ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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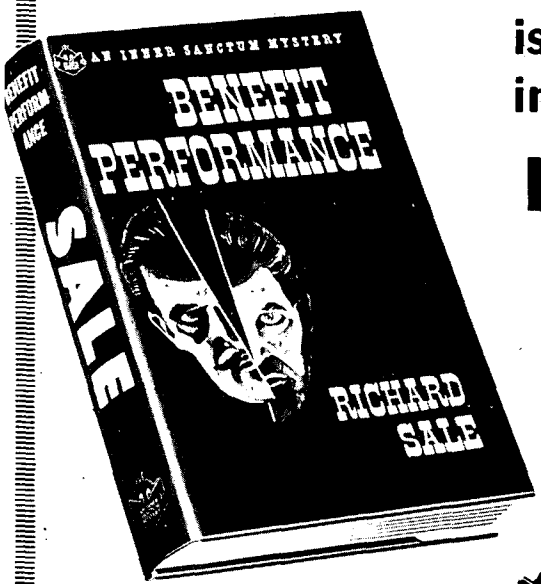

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 7 NO. 30 MAY 1946

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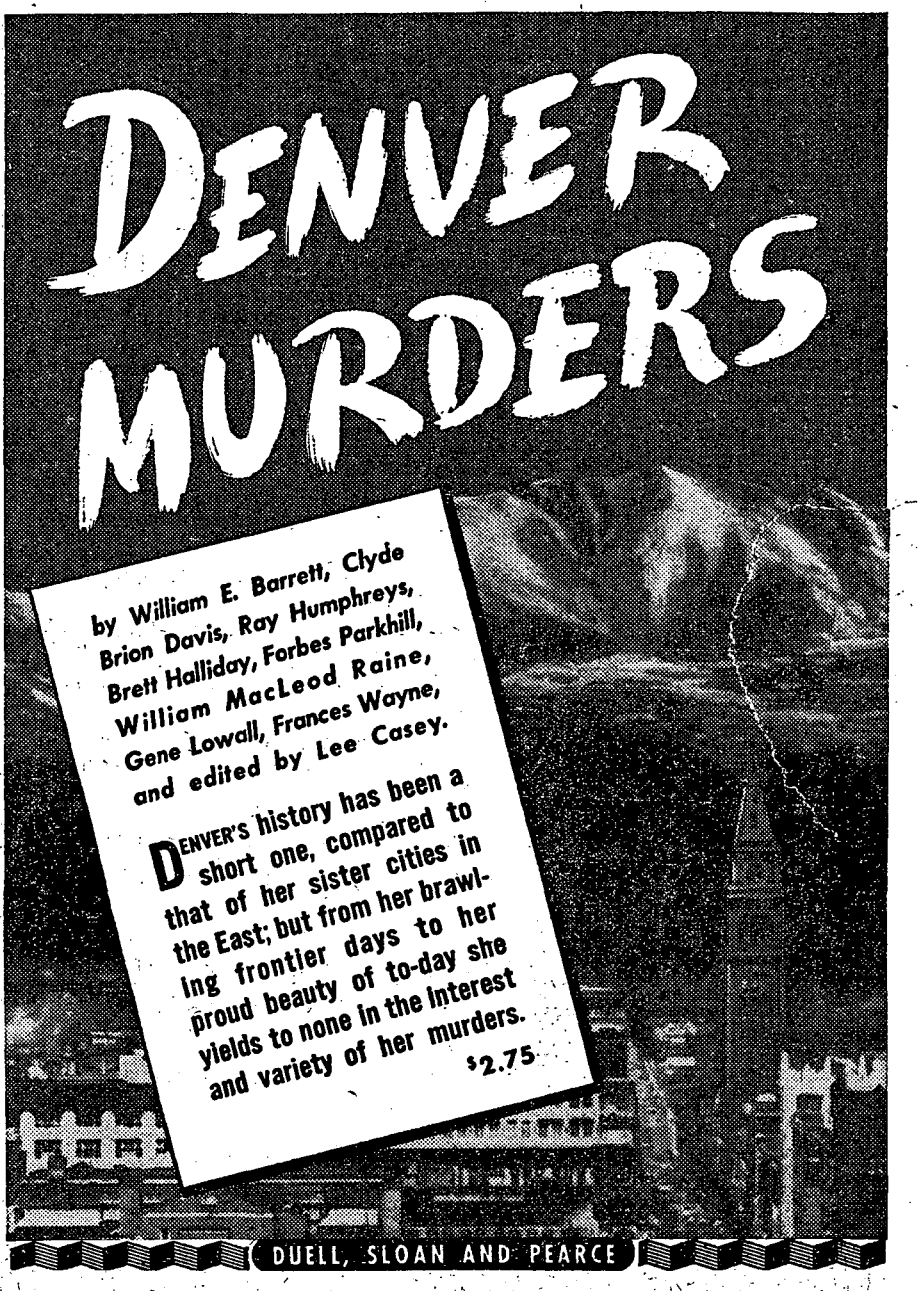
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THE CRIME CLUB

Elisha Macomber at work again amid the hatred and vengeance which embroiled Penberthy Island

When the local boys, Tad, Pershing, and Pudgy, returned from the wars, Penberthy Island turned out in gala attire to welcome them. But something was stirring and seething below the surface, and broke forth the next day in *murder*.

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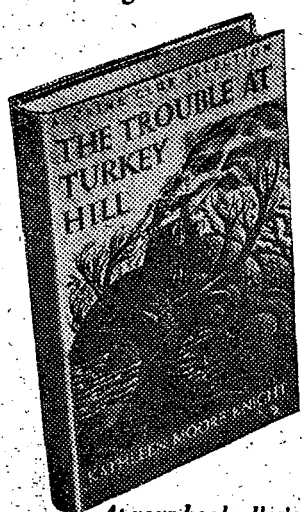
Mystery fans will be happy to welcome back the inimitable Elisha Macomber in



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The April selection of
THE CRIME CLUB

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SECOND-PRIZE WINNER: MANNING COLES

Collaborations in the mystery field are not too rare, but the work of such duo-detectival efforts have not appeared frequently in EQMM. Of course, the short stories and radio adventures of Ellery Queen are the product of a combined operation — by this time most of you know that Ellery Queen (and Barnaby Ross) are two people, Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, cousins. Two brothers, Jerome and Harold Prince, have contributed two stories to EQMM. And recently we brought you two stories by Q. Patrick and Patrick Quentin (who are also known as Jonathan Stagge). Patrick-Quentin-Stagge is also a collaboration — their real names are Richard Webb and Hugh Wheeler.

As you see, not many tandem 'tec twins. That is why we call your particular attention to the author of one of the second-prize winners — Manning Coles, the pseudonym of an English writing team whose full names are Adelaide Francis Manning and Cyril Henry Coles, the first man-and-woman twosome to appear in EQMM. (No, that's wrong — our memory is failing us: we published "A Lesson in Crime" in July 1944, by G. D. H. and M. I. Cole, a famous husband-and-wife duo whose full names are George Douglas Howard and Margaret Isabel Cole.)

Manning Coles are the creator of Thomas Elphinstone Hambledon. Tommy Hambledon is the secret-service-agent-extraordinary who emerged most imaginatively from the late War To End War. It is said on good authority that both Manning Coles were connected with British Military Intelligence and that their books are based on personal experiences in the arena of international intrigue; surely they have achieved a remarkable and dramatic verisimilitude in all their novels.

Their first book was DRINK TO YESTERDAY *in which, against the background of World War I, Tommy Hambledon made his secret service déb... Hambledon and a comrade attempt to escape to England but a blunder exposes their true identity. Circumstances separate the two men, leaving Hambledon alone in a hostile country. His subsequent adventures are among the most exciting in spy-and-counterspy annals.*

The second book, A TOAST TO TOMORROW, *finds Hambledon in a German Naval Hospital suffering from amnesia as the result of a serious head wound. He is accepted by the Germans as one Klaus Lehmann and eventually becomes a power in the growing Nazi party. Taking a leaf out of Leblanc — remember how Arsène Lupin under the name of M. Lenormand became Chief of the Paris Detective-Service? — Hambledon rises steadily in position, ultimately becoming Chief of Police of Berlin, and it is*

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while Hambledon sits in that mighty seat that he suddenly recovers his memory. There's a situation! — a British espionage agent the Chief of Police of Berlin just before the last World War!

In the third book, THEY TELL NO TALES, *Hambledon returns to England and discovers that counter-espionage in one's own country is often more dangerous than in enemy territory.*

Still operating in England in the fourth book, WITHOUT LAWFUL AUTHORITY, *Hambledon takes on a gang of housebreakers and blackmailers, and finds in a sinister boarding house his old nemesis, spies. In the fifth book,* GREEN HAZARD, *Hambledon makes his way back to Berlin, in the midst of World War II. This time he poses as Herr Professor Ulseth, "German" inventor of a new and more deadly explosive. After desperate derring-do, Hambledon is finally deported to England, at the very moment when Goebbels is murmuring, "Now where did I see that face before?" The latest book is* THE FIFTH MAN, *Crime Club Selection of January 1946, and of it "The Gunman" of the Crime Club says: "It in no way departs from the Hambledon tradition of humor, hair-raising adventure, and suspense."*

All of which brings us to the immediate matter in hand. For EQMM's first annual short-story contest, the Manning Coles submitted the first Tommy Hambledon short story ever written. "Handcuffs Don't Hold Ghosts" won a second prize in the contest, and we are proud and privileged to be its guardian angel, patron saint, and publisher.

This first Tommy Hambledon short story is more than a secret service yarn. It ranges far and wide among the species and varieties of the form: for here in a single story you will find ghostbreaking, the supernatural, mystery, horror, detection, secret service work, humor, hair-raising adventure, suspense — and a surprise ending in the final paragraph that will, or should, give you a terrific jolt. Now play fair — start at the beginning!

HANDCUFFS DON'T HOLD GHOSTS

by MANNING COLES

"ALL YOU have to do," said Tommy Hambledon, concluding the discussion, "is to send some of your young gentlemen to Maidstone to arrest this fellow. If he admits it, you —"

"I have," said Chief Inspector Bagshott. He leaned back in one of Hambledon's large armchairs and stretched his long legs to the fire. "I am even now awaiting news of what happens when they pounce."

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"I hope you had the sense to tell them to ring you up here."

"Yes. I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Of course not. What shall we do while we're waiting? Improve each other's mind with converse, or listen to the radio, or play dominoes or shove-ha'penny, or tease the cat, or —"

"Turn on the radio," said Bagshott sleepily. "I don't want to play at anything."

"And your mind is past improvement," said Tommy gracefully. "Well, we'll see what's on, anyway."

He switched on the wireless set, dropped into the chair opposite Bagshott's, and threw some more logs on the fire. "Cold tonight," he began, but a voice on the radio interrupted him.

". . . scene is certainly eerie enough," it said. "The walls of this ancient house seem to exude shadows, if the suggestion is not too fantastic. It is a stormy night though the weather has cleared at the moment; black clouds are chasing each other across the sky so that one moment it is bright moonlight and the next the whole scene is wrapped in veils of —"

"What is all this?" said Hambledon in a pained voice, and picked up the *Times*. "Oh. 'Broadcast of an Investigation into some mysterious happenings in an old house in Yorkshire, alleged to be haunted.' A ghost hunt, Bagshott. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Not much. There may be such things, I've never seen one. Any ghosts I have hitherto encountered have always been the cover for — ah — nefarious enterprises." He yawned.

"The sleepier you get, the longer the words you use," said Tommy. "I've noticed that about you before."

". . . long double range of windows above me are all dark," said the radio commentator. "These are the windows which are said to blaze with unearthly light at times; all I can say is that they're not doing it at the moment. Well, that is the picture outside this strange and desolate mansion. I am now going to move indoors to another microphone set up in what is called the Great Hall, and we'll see how things are going on in there."

"Short pause while he gallops across the mediaeval courtyard, up the worn steps indelibly stained with the blood of Bad Sir Roderick," said Hambledon, "and through the heavily studded postern door through which so many lords and ladies fair have —"

"The heavily studded postern door —" said the commentator.

"Told you so," said Tommy.

"Oh, do let the fellow get on," said Bagshott, opening one eye.

"Well, I'm not stopping him, am I?"

"This vast apartment, fully seventy-five feet long and forty feet wide, with lofty walls running up to a wonderful hammer-beam roof, must be impressive enough at all times; but tonight, by the uncertain beams of our torches, it is — er — very impressive indeed. The walls are panelled

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in ancient oak up to a height of six feet or so, above that they are bare stone pierced by six slender lancet windows. On the other side — excuse me a moment, I think something is happening. Just a moment and I'll go and find out."

There followed the sound of footsteps and an indistinct murmur of voices. Bagshott awoke sufficiently to sip his whisky and Hambledon rearranged the logs to better advantage. The voice on the radio began again.

"All lights are to be put out; have been put out, in fact. Sir Alured Acton and Dr. Wallace Mendip, the two famous investigators into psychic phenomena, have just told me that, according to their recording instruments, a very definite and significant drop in temperature is taking place. For the benefit of those of you who may be without personal experience of ghost-hunting, I ought to explain that the first symptom, so to speak, of the onset of psychic phenomena is frequently an otherwise inexplicable drop in temperature. I may say that I had noticed it myself, but I thought perhaps that it was just me, if you know what I mean.

"This great hall was eerie enough before, but now, with the only light that which the fluctuating moonlight casts through the tall windows, it's enough to give anyody what is rightly called the creeps. Er — just a moment. Anything else happening, gentlemen?" A short pause, filled with whispers. "Nothing more at the moment. You know, these ghost-hunting expeditions — and I have been privileged to take part in previous attempts of this kind — too often seem to me like that effective little scene between boasting Glendower and Hotspur in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth*, where Glendower says: 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep,' and Hotspur comes back at him with: 'But will they come when you do call for them?' Got that one off, anyway. Just a moment . . . Dr. Wallace Mendip tells me that Sir Alured Acton is going into the further anteroom to look at his recording instruments there. I was just going to tell you some more about this wonderful old hall. In between each of the windows is set a flagstaff at an angle, each with a tattered banner hanging from it, such as you often see in cathedrals. What a fine phrase, by the way, 'tattered banners', there's the sound of trumpets in it. Well, these particular banners are moving very slightly, of course there's always a draught in huge places like this, and their shadows on the floor are moving too. In fact, I can really only tell that the banners are moving by watching their shadows, the banners themselves are up above me in the dark." There was a moment's pause, while the commentator apparently thought this over. "It's very curious," he went on, in a voice which gained in sincerity what it lost in resonance, "that things which are themselves in the dark should cast shadows. Yet there they are, moving on the floor, very dim but I can just see them. It can't be anything else,

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because — just a moment. Dr. Mendip! Are you there? I will just draw Dr. Wallace Mendip's attention to this curious optical illusion. Dr. Mendip!"

"You know," said Hambledon appreciatively, "this show is being exceedingly well done. I congratulate the B.B.C., I do indeed."

"Dr. Wallace Mendip appears to have left the room, no doubt to consult with Sir Alured Acton. I should imagine their thermographic lines are running downhill at a gradient of about one in four, judging by what I — here! Who are you? What the — *don't do that* —" There followed an extraordinary bubbling sound.

Hambledon and Bagshott sat up and stared at the wireless set and each other.

"Something's happened," said Tommy in an incredulous voice. A swishing noise was heard, after which there was silence.

"Hear that?" added Hambledon. "That was the ghost going away."

"Taking the commentator with him?"

"Presumably, since he's no longer commenting. You know, Bagshott, either this show was put on by someone with an unusually fine imagination, or something queer is happening."

"Give the credit to the B.B.C.," said Bagshott, relaxing comfortably.

"I'd like to, but these psychic investigator fellows, Acton and Mendip, wouldn't lend themselves to any mockery of spookery. They take it very seriously in —"

"Rigby," said the radio suddenly, and Hambledon started. "Rigby? Where are you?" It was a high-pitched voice, immediately answered by a deeper one at a little distance.

"What's the matter, Mendip?"

"The two experts," murmured Hambledon.

"That fellow from the B.B.C.," said Mendip in an irritated voice. "His name was Rigby, wasn't it? He isn't here. He's gone, Acton."

"Perhaps he became alarmed," said Acton, with a particularly pleasant laugh. "It is a trifle eerie here, if you don't like that sort of thing. Never mind. You didn't want him here in the first place, so why worry? We can carry on quite well without him. This thermograph reading is certainly interesting — look at it, it's dropped six degrees in ten minutes. Will you just look at the ones in the long gallery, the serving-room and the kitchen? I'll stay here for a time, I think."

"Very well," said Mendip.

"All this listening," said Bagshott presently, "makes my ears ache."

"Listen," whispered Hambledon.

There came again the swishing sound they had heard before, and a faint gasp as though Sir Alured Acton had drawn a sharp breath. Silence for a moment; then a muffled thud and a rustling sound, and again the swishing noise. Then total silence.

"Don't say it's got him too," said Bagshott, sitting on the edge of his chair.

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"Speak, Sir Alured," urged Hambledon.

But nothing whatever happened for several minutes, when suddenly the radio whispered. "Acton! Where are you?"

"That fellow wears rubber soles," complained Hambledon. "He always makes me jump."

"Acton, there's a luminous radiation — Acton! Is that you?"

Once more they heard the now familiar swish and something uncommonly like a chuckle.

"Rigby," said Mendip, justly irritated, "if you think this is a suitable moment for low-comedy horseplay, I beg to — aughh!" The usual sweeping noise introduced another period of silence.

"I've heard of witches riding on broom-sticks," said Hambledon, relaxing a strained attitude which was turning to cramp, "but this ghost appears to wear brushes on his feet. I picture him arriving on them in curving swoops, like a small boy on roller skates."

"You know," said Bagshott, "I am by no means so sure that this is entirely funny. Where is this alleged haunted house?"

"Doesn't say," said Tommy, consulting the program.

There emerged from the radio the clumping sound of ordinary mankind wearing ordinary shoes, two men together.

"This sounds more natural," said Tommy. "Likeable fellows these, I'm sure."

"Well, I don't see nothing," said one voice. "Nor anybody. Where's our Mister Rigby?"

"I don't like this place, Bert," said the other.

"Rigby'd no business to have left the mike like that."

"And I don't reckon we should have left the van."

"You've got the wind up," said the first man.

"Radio engineers from the relay van," murmured Hambledon, and Bagshott nodded.

"Over in that corner! Something moved. Look, Bert."

"Oh, can it. D'you suppose Rigby's been —"

The next second there was a yell that made Hambledon's head ring, a confused noise of battle, a resounding slap and Bert's voice saying "Got you, you —!" More thuds, and a silence broken by the voice of an announcer saying, in faintly horrified tones, that that concluded the very interesting and successful broadcast from A Haunted House in Yorkshire. The next item on the program would follow at eleven-thirty, in just over two minutes time. Hambledon switched off.

"I wondered how much more the B.B.C. would stand," he said. "That last epithet shook them to the teeth. Bert overplayed his part a bit."

"You think it was all a play?" said Bagshott doubtfully.

"Well, it was beautifully timed, wasn't it? Due to end at eleven-thirty, and it did. I'm still surprised at Acton and Mendip, though."

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"I'd still like to know what house that was."

"Ring 'em up and ask, then," said Tommy. "There's the telephone."

Bagshott did so.

"Barebreak Hall," he said, putting down the receiver. "East Riding."

"Oh, really?" said Hambledon in a surprised voice. "That's odd. I know the fellow who lives there; in fact, I spent a weekend there once some years ago."

"Who is he?"

"Wayland. Colonel Wayland. Retired Army man."

"Was the house haunted then?"

"Reputed to be, and certainly looked the part, but I didn't see any bogies."

The telephone rang and a voice, asking for Bagshott, gave him the news from Maidstone for which he had been waiting.

"Satisfactory?" asked Hambledon.

"Oh, quite. He's in the bag. Well, I think I'll go home to bed now, and thank you very much for an interesting and exciting evening. If I hear any more about the events at Barebreak Hall, I'll ring you up, shall I?"

"Please," said Tommy. "I shall be interested, knowing the place — and the owner."

After Bagshott had gone, Hambledon, of British intelligence, leaned against the mantelpiece and wondered what all this curious business meant. Wayland had his full share of the wild streak which is apt to crop out in Yorkshire coastal families whose forefathers were pirates; "From the violence of the Danes," murmured Hambledon, "good Lord deliver us." But snatching eminent psychic research workers and B.B.C. officials seemed a trifle over the mark even for Wayland.

Bagshott rang up Hambledon next morning while he was still breakfasting. "That Yorkshire business we listened to last night," he said. "The B.B.C. called in the police and the Chief Constable has rung me up. I'm catching the ten past ten from King's Cross. Are you coming?"

"I am," said Hambledon. "Naturally. Have you got any mousetraps?"

"Mousetraps?" said the astonished Chief Inspector. "What sort of mousetraps?"

"The ordinary break-back kind. And a reel of —"

"What the devil do you want mousetraps for?"

"To catch ghosts, of course. And a reel —"

"Look here, Hambledon. This matter is serious."

"So am I," said Tommy, and rang off.

He did a little shopping on his way to the station where he found Bagshott waiting for him with an attaché-case and a pained expression.

"Got your mousetraps?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you," said Tommy sweetly. "And some reels of black cotton and a few fish-hooks. One never knows."

"I don't, for one."

"Look here, Bagshott. If you put your hand on a mousetrap in the dark

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and it goes off and bites you, what do you do?"

"Say 'damn'," admitted the Chief-Inspector.

"Would a ghost, do you think?"

"Oh, well," said Bagshott resignedly, and led the way to the train.

On arrival at Withernsea they consulted with the Chief Constable and his Superintendent. The usual steps had been taken to find the missing persons, but without result. Naturally, everyone in the neighborhood had listened to the broadcast and had noticed the various queer noises. They were definitely not — repeat, not — effects put on by the B.B.C.; it was a perfectly genuine running commentary upon and relay of whatever had actually taken place.

"That swishing noise," said Hambledon.

"It sounded rather like a curtain sweeping the ground," said the Chief Constable.

"Are there any curtains in the Great Hall?" asked Bagshott.

"No. None."

"It sounded to me," said the Superintendent diffidently, "to be more of a sliding noise."

"Ah," said Hambledon, and looked at him with approval.

"And the hall is panelled," continued the Superintendent. "But we have sounded and examined all the panelling very thoroughly and can find no indication of any space behind it anywhere."

"The simplest way," said Bagshott, "would be to pull it all down."

"Sixteenth-century panelling," said the Chief Constable discontentedly, for he was an antiquarian.

The Superintendent provided further information. Barebreak village had an inn called the Wayland Arms, where it would be possible to obtain shelter if not comfort. Barebreak Hall was three miles from the village, in a fold of the cliffs, close to the sea. It was on the telephone and so was the Police Cottage in the village.

Bagshott thanked the Chief Constable and his Superintendent for the great help they had already given and would doubtless continue to supply, without which strangers from London, like himself, would be completely helpless in unfamiliar surroundings, and rose to take his leave. "I'd like to go straight there, if we may," he added.

"Certainly. By all means," said the Chief Constable. "I have arranged for a car to be at your disposal. It is probably waiting outside for you now." The Superintendent hastily went out to see about it. "A word in your ear, gentlemen. Colonel Wayland — excellent fellow — good family, lived there for generations — fine military record — just a bit difficult sometimes. Tendency to eremitism —"

"Eh?" said Bagshott.

"To live like a hermit. Discourages visitors. Wants tactful handling. In fact —" and the Chief Constable made the gesture of one drinking from a glass.

"Indeed," said Bagshott. "Thank you very much, Chief Constable."

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"He goes fishing," said the Chief Constable.

Bagshott looked faintly puzzled, the Superintendent announced the car, and the meeting terminated.

Once in the car, with the police driver in front minding his own business, Bagshott and Hambledon looked at each other and laughed.

"Well, I don't blame them," said Tommy. "A gang of wretched nosey-parkers from far-off London come rushing in where they're not wanted, broadcasting ancient and respected local secrets. Then they are idiots enough to get into trouble, and more strangers arrive proposing to destroy sixteenth-century panelling in order to find them. No wonder our reception was rather tepid."

Bagshott grunted and changed the subject. "How long is it since you last saw Colonel Wayland?"

"Oh, some little time," said Tommy carelessly. "Doesn't it get dark early up here?"

"Pretty bleak here in the winter."

They drove straight to Barebreak Hall, grim and unfriendly in the cold November daylight. The house was built round three sides of a courtyard; the Great Hall faced them as they drove in. There was a police-constable on duty outside the door, well outside, as Bagshott remarked.

"Don't blame him. He doesn't want to disappear. I think I'll start by seeing Wayland."

Hambledon walked round to the entrance door in the south wing, the only part of the house still inhabited, and pulled an iron handle to ring a clanging bell. The door was opened by an ancient manservant who stared at him distrustfully.

"Good evening, Morris," said Tommy. "Do you remember me? Mr. Hambledon. I spent a weekend here in 1940."

The old man peered at Hambledon, and his face cleared.

"I am sorry, sir, I ought to have recognized you, but my sight isn't what it was."

"Is Colonel Wayland at home?"

Morris drew back.

"The Colonel, sir, is not receiving."

"He'll see me," said Tommy confidently.

"I'll tell him you called, sir, certainly," said Morris doubtfully, "but my orders are to say that the Colonel is not seeing anyone."

"He'll see me," said Tommy again.

Morris came out upon the step and spoke in a confidential voice.

"I wish he would, sir, but I doubt it. Why, he'll hardly see me."

"Really? Why, what's the matter?"

"I don't know, sir, I wish I did. He's been very queer for some days now, ever since he returned from his last fishing expedition."

"Isn't he well?"

"I think he's quite well, sir. He's just — different."

"Oh. Well, go and ask him to see me, there's a good chap."

"I can't at the moment, sir. The Colonel is out fishing."

"Fishing," said Tommy.

"Yes, sir. Off the end of the jetty.

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With worms for bait. He dug them up himself, sir, and put them in a tin."

"Heavens above," said Hambledon.

"Yes, sir," said Morris mournfully. "There's other changes, too. He puts his shoes the wrong side of the door. He used to write us servants little notes overnight when he wanted anything done first thing in the morning; now he types them on his new typewriter and I don't know when it came, sir. And he's gone right off kippers."

"Oh dear," said Tommy sympathetically. "Well, it's no use my waiting about now, as he's out. Tell him I came, will you, Morris, and I shall be calling again later?"

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

Hambledon walked quickly away to look for Bagshott, whom he found standing in the Great Hall in the half-dark, watching the shadows growing taller every moment.

"They're quite right, you know," said the Chief Inspector. "This is an eerie spot and there's no electric light, at least not in this part of the house."

"Come with me," said Hambledon, taking him by the arm and piloting him across the hall to a small door on the further side. "I want to show you the view towards the sea before it gets too dark."

"View," began Bagshott.

"Magnificent view. Come and look. Right out to sea."

The small door admitted them to a wide terrace paved with worn flagstones and running the whole length of the house. The two men crossed it and leaned their elbows on the stone balustrade on the further side.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" went on Hambledon. "Practically a sheer drop of two hundred feet to that strip of beach below, and all before us lies the great expanse of the North Sea, dove-coloured in the evening light, heaving so smoothly and gently that one would never — oh, all right," he added, catching Bagshott's eye. "Actually, though, we've plenty of time. Away below you to the left you can see the end of a small stone jetty, and on it the figure of a fisherman."

"I see the figure, but he's not fishing."

"He has been. With a worm, Bagshott, with a common garden worm in seawater. He is now packing up his tackle to come home, it is getting chilly and will soon be dark. That is a private jetty, Bagshott, for the use of this house alone, and the only way from it is a steep flight of steps which comes up to the far end of this terrace. Two hundred and seventy-five steps, and only two small level stretches to rest your aching legs. I told Wayland — the fisherman has gone out of sight, shall we walk towards the head of the steps to meet him? — I told Wayland he ought to have a lift installed or he'd grow bulging calves like a ballet-dancer's."

"But he didn't, presumably," said Bagshott, turning to pace slowly along the terrace by Hambledon's side. "Who is the fisherman you're so in-

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terested in? Wayland himself?"

"The light isn't good enough now," said Tommy, "to recognize a man when one only has a foreshortened view of him two hundred feet below. But I was told, when I called at the house just now, that master had gone fishing, so I assume this is very probably he. You don't know him, do you, Bagshott?"

"No. Never seen him."

They lounged against the balustrade near the head of a steep flight of stone steps which curved out of sight, following the contour of the cliffs, to reappear immeasurably smaller a hundred feet below.

"Nice piece of engineering," said Bagshott.

Hambledon did not answer; the Chief Inspector glanced at him and saw that his face was hard and that there were grim lines round his mouth. Presently the sound of steps came up to them and a man came into sight, walking wearily as might be expected of one who had toiled up two hundred and seventy-five nine-inch steps. He exhibited no surprise at the sight of two men on his terrace; he came straight on and merely nodded to them in passing with no sign of recognition on his face. Hambledon made no movement towards him and the fisherman walked away along the terrace without looking back.

"Wasn't that Colonel Wayland after all, then?" asked Bagshott.

"It looked exactly like him."

"But he didn't recognize you."

"He didn't, did he?" said Hambledon, his eyes following the fisherman until he rounded the far end of the house and disappeared from sight.

"Well? What now?"

"Give him ten minutes to wash his hands and order tea — unless he's gone off tea as well as kippers — and then I think we'll go and call on him."

Hambledon, accompanied by Bagshott, pulled the iron ring by the door in the south wing; again the deep-toned bell clanged and again old Morris opened the door. This time Bagshott stood forward and handed in his card.

"Chief Inspector Bagshott to see Colonel Wayland," he said formally.

"The Colonel is not receiving," said Morris.

"Take my card to him, please," said Bagshott, and walked forward so authoritatively that poor Morris found he had somehow admitted them both before he realized what was happening. He said, "Oh, dear," under his breath and shut the front door.

He asked them to be so good as to wait a moment while he informed the Colonel and trotted away across the hall and down a passage. They heard him knock at a door and then open it.

"He's rather frightened of his master, isn't he?" said Bagshott in a low voice.

"It would seem so," said Hambledon evenly, and the Chief Inspector glanced at him. He had heard that deliberately level voice before and it always meant trouble for somebody.

Morris returned. "If you will come

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this way, gentlemen."

They followed him down the passage into a pleasant room lined with books and furnished with leather armchairs and a large desk behind which a man was sitting facing them. He looked up as they came in and Hambledon studied him intently. Wayland, undoubtedly Wayland. The same colorless hair growing far back from a high forehead, the same fair complexion reddened and coarsened by exposure to wind and weather, the same high-bridged nose, lean cheeks and firm jaw, light blue eyes and wide thin-lipped mouth. One ear stuck out more than the other, all correct and exact. Yet again he looked at Hambledon and did not recognize him.

"Mr. Hambledon and Chief Inspector Bagshott," said Morris, putting them in what he plainly considered to be the correct social order. He then retired and shut the door behind him. The man at the desk rose to receive them.

"Colonel Wayland?" asked Bagshott.

"Yes. What can I do for you, gentlemen? Please sit down." The voice was the voice of Wayland, too.

Bagshott introduced himself and Hambledon and said that they were sorry to intrude upon Colonel Wayland, but enquiries had to be made in regard to the unfortunate occurrences at the broadcast, and so forth. Wayland nodded owlishly and Hambledon sat back in his chair, watching through half-closed eyes. Wayland was wearing his signet-ring as usual, that signet-ring from which he would never be parted. No, not quite as usual, he wasn't wearing it on the right finger. He always used to wear it on the middle finger of his left hand because it was rather a large size — it had belonged to his father, a man so big as to be nearly gigantic. Tonight he was wearing it on the fourth finger as though it were an engagement ring. Well, perhaps his hands had swollen a bit, they looked it. But —

Wayland was talking. "I am a man who likes a quiet life, gentlemen. A quiet life," he repeated, and his voice went up and down like a drunkard's. Bagshott remembered what the Chief Constable had said about Wayland's habits; evidently this was one of his bouts and there was a half-empty glass on the desk. Hambledon had been right, Wayland's tea was whisky.

"I don't want people buzzing about," said Wayland, with the gesture of a man brushing away flies. "Buzzing about. Staring in windows. Driving vans into my courtyard. Putting things in the Great Hall. Don't like it. Do a spot of fishing, come up here, quiet evening — glass of something and a book. Quiet life." He smiled unexpectedly and added, "Have a drink."

His visitors refused, but accepted cigarettes. There was a small table, with an ashtray upon it, within Hambledon's reach; he pulled it towards him for greater convenience. He looked at the ashtray with affection; it was a large and heavy one with thick rounded edges.

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Bagshott appeared to be making rather heavy weather of the interview. Wayland didn't know anything and didn't bother about anything or anybody, and why should they bother him? Strangers about? No. Not till these wretched B.B.C. people came. If they had stayed away they wouldn't have got lost. Nobody invited them.

Bagshott looked down at his boots. Hambledon removed his attention from Wayland's hands to his face and took up the running.

"You must admit, Colonel, that this place has a very well authenticated history of hauntings. Hasn't it?" Wayland raised his eyebrows and made a sweeping gesture as of one who just brushes away intrusive ghosts. "Quite enough to justify great interest on the part of psychic researchers."

"Phoo," said Wayland.

"Not 'phoo' at all," said Tommy earnestly. "You must know that psychic research is a quite serious and highly scientific — er — science. Besides, you gave them permission to come. Didn't you?"

"All a mistake. Ghost fellers want to come. More fellers coming to see to drains. Wrote two letters, no to one, yes to others. Put in wrong envelopes." He smiled sleepily. "Silly. Wasn't well that morning. So ghost fellers came, drain-fellers stayed away. Like that." He yawned, putting up his right hand.

"But —" began Tommy.

"Lishen. When you shee — see — what I see sometimes, you won't bother 'bout a few ghosts. Hyenas — yellow ones with green eyes — goin' round and round the room, and I always think they're goin' to knock the lamp brackets off the wall an' they never do. Mad hyenas — green and yellow ones." His voice trailed off and his eyes wandered dreamily round the walls as though following some vision.

Tommy stubbed out his third cigarette, pulled the small table nearer yet, and began confidentially. "Sitting here talking to you like this — or rather, listening to you talking to us — reminds me of watching a cabaret act." Wayland's eyes abruptly ceased to wander and focussed themselves on Hambledon. "You know, quite funny and brilliantly done, but it doesn't seem quite real." Wayland shed his sleepy look completely and Bagshott drew himself together. "I remember watching one almost as good at the Rosenhof in Berlin in 1937. It was quite brilliant, Herr Schewitz, but not so brilliant as the show you put up here tonight, Schewitz. Dammit, you nearly got me guess —"

The man behind the desk moved like a flash and an automatic appeared in his hand, but Tommy was ready for him. He hurled the ashtray straight in his face, cigarette litter and all, and followed it by lunging across the desk and seizing the gun hand. Bagshott ran round the desk and hit the spluttering Schewitz over the head with a paperweight, after which the desk chair gave way and proceed-

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ings became confused. The automatic fell to the carpet when Hambledon hit its owner over the knuckles with a ruler and was kicked in the jaw by way of reprisal. The brawl ended with Tommy sitting heavily upon Schewitz and twisting his arm while Bagshott handcuffed wrists together behind the prisoner's back.

"One more chirp out of you," said Hambledon, caressing his jaw, "and I'll tie your feet together and hang you out of the window head downwards to cool off. Bagshott, charge this man with kidnaping, unlawful imprisonment, impersonation with intent to defraud, being on enclosed premises with felonious intent, and anything else you like to put down including, probably, murder. Where is Wayland, you — you painted scarecrow?"

"Find him," said the prisoner indistinctly, for he had bitten his tongue in the skirmish.

"We'll take him out this way," said Hambledon, indicating another door than that by which they had come in. "It leads to the terrace. I don't want Morris to see him if it can be helped, it'll take a lot of explaining and perhaps, with luck, he needn't know."

The prisoner was driven away in the police car with the constable from the door of the Great Hall as escort. The constable seemed pleased. Bagshott used the Barebreak Hall telephone for a conversation with the Chief Constable while Hambledon reassured Morris.

"Now," said the Chief-Inspector, "if you would please explain?"

"I ought to start by saying that I know Wayland a lot better than I admitted last night. He works for me on M.I.5. and incidentally is anything but a dipsomaniac; in fact, he hardly touches drink at all. That story is put about to cover absences from home on business. My business. So are the fishing expeditions. When I saw him a few weeks ago he was just off to Germany to trace a few of the more important Nazis who are still missing. I don't know where he is now. This man whom you saw tonight is a really brilliant impersonator, and used to do impersonations as a stage-act. His make-up is really wonderful, too. When I was in Berlin I saw him several times, he was quite uncanny, but tonight's act was the best I've ever seen. It puzzled me; frankly, I began to wonder whether somebody had caught Wayland and doped him. It was the hands that gave him away. This signet-ring," Hambledon produced it from his pocket, "Wayland always wore it on his middle finger. I told him it was absurd to wear a signet-ring on his job, but he used to say he could always turn the bezel inside. Yes, but if you habitually wear a signet-ring and your hands are sunburnt, there's a white patch on your finger under the ring. Schewitz had no white patch on his middle finger. And Wayland had no scar on his right hand, but Schewitz had. I was there when he acquired it. He did an impersonation of Goering in front of Goering himself; he often did and

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usually it went down very well. On this night Goering was drunk and flared up suddenly. He threw a bottle at Schewitz who put up his hand to defend his face; the bottle broke and slashed him badly. A long curving cut from knuckle to wrist, it left a conspicuous scar. I saw it several times after that; tonight I saw it again. That's all."

"What I thought suspicious," said Bagshott, "was that he became progressively drunker and yet he wasn't drinking. He didn't touch that glass."

"There was also that, of course. Yes, a brilliant mimic, our Schewitz, but otherwise stupid. By the way, there are underground passages here; Wayland told me so once, but I don't know how you get into them. There are foreign bodies in them at the moment, no doubt."

"And the ghost-hunters, if they're still alive."

"They may be held as hostages," said Tommy. "I suppose Wayland gave them permission to come and Schewitz did not dare to tell them to buzz off. It must have startled the squatters when the investigating party arrived."

"Why didn't they stay below?"

"I don't suppose any modern amenities are laid on to the castle dungeons so I expect they had to come up for water. I hope so, because that means they will have to come up again. We are going to do some ghost-hunting tonight, Bagshott.

"Morris told the police," said Bagshott, "that though he'd always understood that there were underground passages here, he'd no idea how one got into them. I suppose he was telling the truth?"

"Oh, yes. It was a sort of family secret. Wayland laughed about it, but he didn't tell. So the best we can do at the moment, I think, is to set a number of booby traps in the Hall and hope that somebody comes out and gets tangled up in them. A thread of black cotton leading to a panel is all I ask. Hence the mousetraps and fish-hooks, Bagshott, though why I bothered to bring fish-hooks to a house already amply supplied with them, I don't know. I must be getting senile."

"Why not pull the panelling down?"

"What, tonight? Do you seriously suppose we should find even four men in this neighborhood prepared to spend the night in the Haunted Hall annoying the ghosts by wrecking their panelling? Especially after what happened last night?"

"I suppose not. Very well, you set your booby traps tonight and tomorrow morning we can call in the Army."

They returned to the Great Hall, now perfectly dark. The moon was rising but was not yet high enough to shine in through the windows, which only showed as tall narrow panels of faint light. Hambledon shone his torch on the walls and up to the commentator's "tattered banners."

"He was right, you know," said Tommy, in a graveyard whisper. "Those things are moving."

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"What things?" said the startled Bagshott. "Oh, the banners. Yes. There's a draught."

"Several draughts. Come and hold the torch for me, I want both hands free."

"How many entran —" began Bagshott, but Tommy checked him. "We may have auditors," he murmured, "we don't know. I feel as though I'm being stared at, don't you?" He worked rapidly, stretching his black cotton from point to point with casts of hooks tied in at intervals.

"If we're really being watched," said Bagshott, "what's the use of doing all this? They'll know all about it."

"Watched we may be," said Tommy mysteriously, "but by whom? Not necessarily by the Germans, you know."

"Are you trying to put the wind up me?" said Bagshott indignantly, but he shivered and Hambledon suppressed a smile.

"Cold, isn't it?" he said. "Now, I think if I were feeling my way about in the dark, I should run my hand along this ledge. This is where the mousetraps come in, each with a loose length of cotton. Listen!"

They stood motionless, but the place seemed filled with tiny noises; a dead leaf scurried across the floor and Bagshott jumped.

"Sounds as though the dam' place was whispering to itself," he said, and Tommy murmured that perhaps it was. "It is haunted, you know," he added, "it really is. You must remember that the squatters won't come out while we're here. So if anything else comes out you needn't try to arrest it. Handcuffs don't hold ghosts."

The place became suddenly lighter and both men looked up. The rising moon had come from behind a cloud and was shining in the windows.

"Now it's just as that fellow described it last night," went on Hambledon. "Just before the shadows began to move about the floor, you know."

"I've seen more cheerful places to spend an evening in, certainly," said Bagshott, and his teeth chattered. "It's getting much colder, too."

"That's the — what did he say? — the first symptom of the onset of psychic phenomena, isn't it?"

"Nonsense," said the Chief Inspector, rather too stoutly. "It's a symptom of the onset of about ten degrees of frost. On a clear night like this — Hist!" They listened again.

"Don't say 'hist'!" said Tommy irritably. "You make me jump. I didn't hear anything — much. There, I think that will do." He put his empty cotton-reels in his pocket.

"Where do you propose to spend the night?"

"In here, with intervals for exercise. Morris has got some hot food for us, shall we go and have it now? Fortified, we shall return."

They came back half an hour later, warmed and refreshed, to find everything just as they had left it. There were some ancient wooden benches along the walls; they sat on the one nearest the door until they shivered

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and a brisk walk round the courtyard or along the terrace warmed them again for another spell of waiting. Still nothing came and the time dragged slowly on with the moonbeams creeping along the walls and the shadows crawling after them.

"I was going to ask you," said Bagshott, in one of their intervals for exercise, "whether there is more than one entrance. Do you know?"

"I don't. There may be half a dozen. We can only watch the place where we know there is one; we'd want a full company of soldiers to watch every possible place."

Just after four a.m. when they were uncomfortably dozing on the hard bench, they felt rather than heard a deep muffled thud. They sat up at once.

"Now tell me what that was," said Hambledon.

"An explosion somewhere. I felt it through the soles of my boots."

"A mine exploding on the shore somewhere?"

They went out on the terrace and looked about them but there was nothing to see, and Bagshott sarcastically suggested spirit-rapping as an explanation.

"Some rap. If they got results like that in some of these South Kensington séances, the Cromwell Road 'ud fall down."

The night passed without any other disturbance, human or otherwise, and just before six Hambledon stretched, shivered, and said that the one thing that would save his life would be instant breakfast. Bagshott agreed. "We'll drive down to the Wayland Arms," he said. "If they're not awake yet we'll roar them up."

"Bacon, eggs, coffee," said Hambledon, coming out of the Great Hall into the courtyard, "sausages — hullo! Morris is up and about anyway."

It was black dark outside, for the moon had long set and there was as yet no sign of the dawn, but the windows of the inhabited south wing were all lit up.

"I don't think we'll bother the Wayland Arms," said Hambledon.

They trotted round to the south wing door, rang the bell and were at once admitted by Morris with a coffeepot in his hand and beaming like the rising sun.

"Oh, sir, come in, please, gentlemen. The Colonel came in just now and he's quite himself again. He —"

"*The Colonel?*" said Hambledon, and at that a door opened at the head of the stairs. A figure, inadequately robed in a bath-towel, looked over the banisters and a voice hailed them in most cheerful tones.

"That you, Tommy? Come on up, I'm having a bath. I'm all over cobwebs and whiskers. I say, what do you think —"

Hambledon went up the stairs three at a time, leaving Bagshott forgotten in the hall below.

"Will you not come in, sir, by the fire? It is bitter outside this morning. I am just bringing in breakfast, sir, you will be glad of some, no doubt." The old butler almost danced into the

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dining-room. "I was surprised to see the master back so soon. I understood from Mr. Hambledon that he might be away some time. And so cheerful, too, he —"

"When did he come back?"

"Only about a quarter of an hour ago. I was just thinking of arising, sir, when my bedroom door opened — dear me, I've forgotten the marmalade — and the master put his head in. 'Buck up, Morris,' he says, 'snoring there on a fine frosty morning like this. I'm starving,' he says, 'and I want my breakfast. Have you got any kippers?' Kippers, he says. I'll lay two more places." Morris trotted away, repeating: "Kippers and marmalade" like the refrain of some happy litany.

Hambledon came in, rubbing his hands and humming tunelessly.

"Oh, hullo, Bagshott. I say, I'm frightfully sorry to rush off and leave you like that. This Colonel Wayland is, of course, the real one. He'll be down in a minute and he's got a story to tell."

"Where did he come from?"

"Out of the underground passages, of course, by another exit. Wayland says will you be so good as to ring up the police and ask them to come in sufficient force to arrest eleven Nazis? If they start at once we shall have a comfortable time for breakfast before we go into action again."

"Eleven Nazis," said Bagshott. "Eleven —" He strode out of the room and could be heard giving incisive instructions to someone who appeared hard to convince that he was both sober and serious.

"They'll be here in an hour or so," he reported to Hambledon, who merely nodded and remarked that boiling coffee was one of the Seven Scents of the Gardens of Paradise. Morris came in with the rest of the breakfast and Wayland ran down the stairs whistling.

"Glad to see you," he said, shaking hands. "Can't think why we've never met before. What a gorgeous fire! This is the first time I've been warm for a fortnight." He became hospitable with coffee, kippers and toast until Bagshott felt that in another minute his suppressed curiosity would blow off with a piercing whistle. Wayland drank his first cup of coffee, poured out another, and began.

"Well, here's the story and you mustn't mind if I talk with my mouth full because this is the first square meal I've had for nearly three weeks. You know, I think," to Bagshott, "that I went to Germany to hunt up missing Nazis. To Hamburg, to be exact. I managed to locate them, or some of them, but picking them up was another matter. Like spilt quicksilver. Eventually I came to the conclusion that the best plan would be to persuade them to collect themselves. I put a story about in the right quarters of a perfectly safe refuge in the subterranean passages of an old house in England — this, of course. It belonged, I said, to a retired Colonel who'd drunk himself gaga and thought he saw ghosts and things — particularly things."

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"Mad hyenas — green and yellow ones," said Hambledon.

"Yes. Well, to cut a long story short, they swallowed it. They purloined a disarmed submarine — they ought to have smelt a rat there, it was made too easy — filled her up with tinned stores, and set sail. By the way, she's sunk just off the jetty. My idea was to get here first, wait till they arrived, and just tip off the military. They were too quick for me. I was in the act of coming in in the *Seamark* — that's my new cabin cruiser — when up they popped about three miles offshore and collected me. So I became the dipsomaniac Colonel and Schewitz spent three days understudying me. Made quite a good job of it, didn't he?"

"Only his hands," said Hambledon, "gave him away. And the minor point that he didn't recognize me."

"Well, you can't expect miracles," said Wayland handsomely. "They took me ashore through the sea-caves, just as I told 'em how, and bolted me into a sort of storeroom down there. Then they persuaded me to tell 'em how to get out at the top. I didn't take much persuading because I remembered the psychic research outfit was coming along two nights later and I reckoned the fun would then begin. So I told 'em the way out into the Great Hall and hoped for the best. Of course I hoped the ghost-hunters would catch one of 'em, hang on to him and then find he was a flesh-and-blood German. I never expected that instead of the ghost-hunters catching them they'd collar the ghost-hunters. Damn silly thing to do, of course, they ought to have known there'd be a fuss made."

"Yes," said Tommy. "Why didn't they just utter a few interesting moans and retire again?"

"For one thing, they didn't know they were supposed to be ghosts; I didn't tell 'em. They thought it was a search-party looking definitely for them, and the popular Nazi formula came into action at once: Take Hostages. Actually, of course, they lost their heads. I laughed till I cried when they brought their captives downstairs; they put one of 'em in with me, a Dr. Mendip. Poor man, he was annoyed. They were a bit short of lock-ups and eventually — last night — they herded us all into one wing as it were, and put a sentry on what they fondly thought was the only exit. They were wrong, so here I am."

"Do the ghost-hunting party know you've escaped?" asked Bagshott.

"No. I'm afraid I thought it wiser not to tell them. I just slid off unobtrusively into a dark corner. They weren't very interested in me, actually, they had their own troubles to occupy their minds. Never mind, it won't be for much longer."

"How do you propose to — er — extract the winkles?" asked Hambledon.

"Just a minute," said Bagshott. "You said just now that they came in through the sea-caves. Can't they get out again that way?"

"No," said Wayland. "I blew the

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entrance in early this morning. Didn't you hear it?"

"That thud we heard —"

"That would be it. I mined the entrance in 1940, just in case. No, they can't get out that way. As for how to evict the winkles, Tommy, perhaps you'd like to persuade them to crawl out on their own pins, as it were. Are the police coming?"

"They should be here," said Bagshott, looking at his watch, "within the next half-hour at latest."

"You'd better rush out and meet them when they do arrive, Bagshott," said Hambledon, "or we shall have the whole posse getting tangled up in fish-hooks and mousetraps and then they'll be quite sure it is a practical joke after all."

"I had some difficulty in convincing them before," said Bagshott. He pushed back his chair and went to the window.

"I know, I heard you," said Tommy.

"It's getting quite light outside," said Bagshott coldly.

"What is all this about fish-hooks?" asked Wayland. Before Hambledon had finished telling him the sound of motor transport was heard and the Chief Inspector dashed out.

"We'll give them a few minutes to tidy the place," said Wayland. "More coffee, Tommy?"

"I couldn't, thanks. You suggested just now that I should go and reason with them. What do I do, walk down a long flight of stairs somewhere and begin simply 'Dear Friends'?"

"You needn't even walk downstairs. There is a sort of irregular chimney in the rock — a slit, as it were — I suppose it's a blow-hole actually. It's too narrow to get through, but you can howl down it with devastating effect below. My brother and I found it when we were boys. The top end is under a loose flagstone on the terrace; it sounded hollow so we howked it up. You lie on your tummy and whisper down it — that's more terrifying than howls. The whisper seems to run round and round at the bottom and blow cold on the back of your neck. Ready?"

They walked down the passage and out to the terrace by the same way that Schewitz had gone the night before. The Colonel fetched a crowbar and operated on a flagstone just outside the library window.

"I was wondering how to begin," said Tommy. "The usual 'Gentlemen' is hardly applicable to the — the personnel below."

"By the way, there's a lady in the party."

"A lady? Who is she?"

"I wasn't introduced," said Wayland primly, but his eyes danced. "There, now help me lift this away and mind what you say," he added, dropping his voice, "they can hear you now. You can hear them answer if you put your head down the hole. Now lie down flat, that's right. Carry on, operator."

Tommy Hambledon arranged himself as comfortably as was consistent

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with granite flagstones in several degrees of frost, put his head over the hole, which looked like a petrified rabbit-hole, and began in a deep mysterious voice.

"*Achtung! Achtung! Achtung!*"

He paused and craned downwards, listening. A confused babble of sound came up, as of a number of people all exclaiming together, followed by one loud voice saying, "Silence!"

"Silence!" echoed Hambledon. "Here is a warning. Listen carefully. You are all lost. You heard the seaward passage blown in some hours ago. The other passage, that leading to the Great Hall, is also mined." He paused to let this sink in, and then kindly repeated it in case any of it had been missed.

"It is an outrage!" said the voice from below. "An inhuman, barbaric, uncivilized outrage!" There was a small tripping echo which ran after the words, whispering "Outrage! Outrage!" in a thin voice.

"*Achtung!* You have one chance for life. You have fifteen minutes in which to give yourselves up. You will proceed —"

"You forget," said the voice, "you forget. We have hostages."

"Hostages, stages, tages," whispered the echo.

"Hostages," said Hambledon, and laughed. "Hostages won't save you. They can't hold the roof up when the mines explode. Hostages, indeed!" he went on, his voice rising to a roar. "Hostages, ho! ho! Hostages!" He listened, and heard above the echoes of his own voice rolling round the caves a high-pitched scream in a woman's voice.

He waited a moment but there was no articulate reply.

"These are your orders," went on Hambledon. "Proceed at once to the exit panel in the Great Hall. The hostages will come out first, unharmed. You will follow closely and come out with your hands up. Do this, and you may live. Disobey and die."

He looked up at Wayland who nodded approval and applauded in dumb show. Hambledon listened again, there seemed to be an argument going on below.

"In a quarter of an hour from now, I press the exploder switch," he said firmly. "Obey and surrender. Disobey and die."

A moment's pause, and the same voice came up from the caves.

"We surrender. We will come."

Tommy rose from the flagstones, dusting himself down and rubbing his chilled hands.

"I haven't enjoyed myself so much since I was the Demon King at a village pantomime in aid of the Sunday School Annual Outing," he said, turning carefully away from the gaping hole. "I was eleven. That was where that 'ho! ho!' business came from."

"Sounded like it," said Wayland. "Better come and warn the escort in the hall now. I bet our friends down below won't be fifteen minutes. They can do it in five if they run."

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He led the way into the Great Hall, now cleared of Hambledon's impedimenta, though one of the constables was furtively sucking a finger. Grey daylight filled the place, which looked cold and grim enough but no longer ghostly. Bagshott was talking to the Chief Constable, the Superintendent stood by with a keen eye on about two dozen policemen. They all looked round as Wayland entered with a hand on Hambledon's shoulder.

"They have decided to surrender," said the Colonel. "Mr. Hambledon persuaded them. It is just as well, it will save a lot of trouble. One moment, and I will open the panel."

He crossed the room to a panel at the far end and did something so quickly that even Hambledon, just behind him, could not be sure what he had done. He pushed at the panel, it slid back and something large and inert fell out.

"That's why your tapping didn't sound hollow," said Wayland, kicking the object out of the way. "That's a mattress."

One of the young constables, who had thought it was a corpse, drew a sharp breath and the Superintendent looked at him sternly.

"Five minutes up," said Tommy, looking at his watch.

"How soon d'you expect —" began the Chief Constable.

"Any moment now," said Wayland.

"Line up, men," said the Superintendent. "Each side of that hole. Truncheons ready."

"Listen," said Wayland. "They're coming."

The sound of steps ascending stone stairs grew louder, and figures came into view. Sir Alured Acton, dusty and unshaven but always courteous, saying: "Thank you, gentlemen, thank you." Dr. Mendip, rubbing his eyes and growling; Rigby, the B.B.C. commentator, and the two radio engineers. A short interval in which the police closed up, breathing heavily. Then the Germans came out with their hands over their heads, grey-faced and docile.

Finally, two figures emerged together. A large young woman with fair hair who carried a bundle under one arm. On her other arm she supported a queer figure six inches shorter than herself, a pallid little man who jerked in every limb as though he had palsy. He had black hair streaked with white which fell limply over his forehead, angry dark eyes, a long pointed nose, and a Charlie Chaplin mustache — the maddest hyena of them all. . . .

"Q"

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Two important announcements concerning Dashiell Hammett and "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine":

(1) *We have just completed negotiations with Mr. Hammett which permit us to continue reprinting adventures of the Continental Op. This is an EQMM exclusive: EQMM has first choice of all the unreprinted Continental Op stories your Editor can rediscover. No other detective-story magazine can make that statement! No other detective-story magazine can reprint a Continental Op yarn unless it has first appeared in EQMM. To date, not including the present issue, we have brought you six exploits of the Continental Op, and during the rest of 1946 and throughout 1947 we plan to bring you at least nine more operations of the Op. Happy hunting — and as always, the happiest hunting in EQMM!*

(2) *The Continental Op is usually described as fat, forty, and nameless. Suppose we told you that all three adjectives are incorrect! The Continental Op is not fat, is not forty, and is not nameless! In the editorial introduction to one of the coming Hammett stories, we shall reveal the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the Continental Op. We shall tell you whether the Op is fat, medium, or lean; whether he is forty, younger, or older; and most important of all, we shall tell you the Continental Op's name! All this information represents a major revelation in detective-story lore. You will be among the first to learn the facts — if you continue reading EQMM.*

In the meantime here is another "unknown" Op opus — rough, tough, and the stuff of which none of us will ever have enough — a slambang, rootin', tootin' Hammett humdinger.

NIGHT SHOTS

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

THE house was of red brick, large and square, with a green slate roof, whose wide overhang gave the building an appearance of being too squat for its two stories; and it stood on a grassy hill, well away from the county road, upon which it turned its back to look down on the Mokelumne River.

The Ford that I had hired to bring me out from Knownburg carried me into the grounds through a high steel-meshed gate, followed the circling gravel drive, and set me down within a foot of the screen porch that ran all the way around the house's first floor.

"There's Exon's son-in-law now," the driver told me as he pocketed the

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bill I had given him, and prepared to drive away.

I turned to see a tall, loose-jointed man of thirty or so coming across the porch toward me — a carelessly dressed man, with a mop of rumpled brown hair over a handsome sunburned face. There was a hint of cruelty in the lips that were smiling lazily just now, and more than a hint of recklessness in his narrow grey eyes.

"Mr. Gallaway?" I asked as he came down the steps.

"Yes." His voice was a drawling baritone. "You are —"

"From the Continental Detective Agency's San Francisco branch," I finished for him.

He nodded, and held the screen-door open for me.

"Just leave your bag there. I'll have it taken up to your room."

He guided me into the house and — after I had assured him that I had already eaten luncheon — gave me a soft chair and an excellent cigar. He sprawled on his spine in an armchair opposite me — all loose-jointed angles sticking out of it in every direction — and blew smoke at the ceiling.

"First off," he began presently, his words coming out languidly, "I may as well tell you that I don't expect very much in the way of results. I sent for you more for the soothing effect of your presence on the household than because I expect you to do anything. I don't believe there's anything to do. However, I'm not a detective. I may be wrong. You may find out all sorts of more or less important things. If you do — fine! But I don't insist upon it."

I didn't say anything, though this beginning wasn't much to my taste. He smoked in silence for a moment, and then went on:

"My father-in-law, Talbert Exon, is a man of fifty-seven, and ordinarily a tough, hard, active, and fiery old devil. But just now he's recovering from a rather serious attack of pneumonia, which has taken most of the starch out of him. He hasn't been able to leave his bed yet, and I understand that Dr. Rench hopes to keep him on his back for at least another week.

"The old man has a room on the second floor — the front, right-hand corner room — just over where we are sitting. His nurse, Miss Caywood, occupies the next room, and there is a connecting door between. My room is the other front one, just across the hall from the old man's; and my wife's bedroom is next to mine — across the hall from the nurse's. I'll show you around later; I just want to make the situation clear to you first.

"Last night, or rather this morning, at about half-past one, somebody shot at Exon while he was sleeping — and missed. The bullet went into the frame of the door that leads to his nurse's room, about six inches above his body as he lay in bed. The course the bullet took in the woodwork would indicate that it had been fired from one of the windows — either through it or from just inside.

"Exon woke up, of course, but he saw nobody. The rest of us — my

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wife, Miss Caywood, the Figgs, and myself — were also awakened by the shot. We all rushed into his room, and we saw nothing either. There's no doubt that whoever fired it left by the window. Otherwise some of us would have seen him — we came from every other direction. However, we found nobody on the grounds, and no traces of anybody. That, I think, is all."

"Who are the Figgs, and who else is there on the place besides you and your wife, Mr. Exon, and his nurse?"

"The Figgs are Adam and Emma; she is the housekeeper and he is a sort of handy-man about the place. Their room is in the extreme rear, on the second floor. Besides them, there is Gong Lim, the cook, who sleeps in a little room near the kitchen, and the three farm hands. Joe Natara and Felipe Fadelia are Italians, and have been here for possibly more than two years; Jesus Mesa, a Mexican, has been here a year or longer. The farm hands sleep in a little house near the barns. I think — if my opinion is of any value — that none of these people had anything to do with the shooting."

"Did you dig the bullet out of the door-frame?"

"Yes. Shand, the deputy sheriff at Knownburg, dug it out. He says it is a .38-caliber bullet."

"Any guns of that caliber in the house?"

"No. A .22 and my .44 — which I keep in the car — are the only pistols on the place. Then there are two shotguns and a .30-30 rifle. Shand made a thorough search, and found nothing else in the way of firearms."

"What does Mr. Exon say?"

"Not much of anything, except that if we'll put a gun in bed with him he'll manage to take care of himself without bothering any policemen or detectives. I don't know whether he knows who shot at him or not — he's a close-mouthed old devil. From what I know of him, I imagine there are quite a few men who would think themselves justified in killing him. He was, I understand, far from being a lily in his youth — or in his mature years either, for that matter."

"Anything definite you know, or are you guessing?"

Gallaway grinned at me — a mocking grin that I was to see often before I was through with this Exon affair.

"Both," he drawled. "I know that his life has been rather more than sprinkled with swindled partners and betrayed friends; and that he saved himself from prison at least once by turning state's evidence and sending his associates there. And I know that his wife died under rather peculiar circumstances while heavily insured, and that he was for some time held on suspicion of having murdered her, but was finally released because of a lack of evidence against him. Those, I understand, are fair samples of the old boy's normal behavior; so there may be any number of people gunning for him."

"Suppose you give me a list of all the names you know of enemies he's made, and I'll have them checked up."

"The names I could give you would

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be only a few in many, and it might take you months to check up those few. It isn't my intention to go to all that trouble and expense. As I told you, I'm not insisting upon results. My wife is very nervous, and for some peculiar reason she seems to like the old man. So, to soothe her, I agreed to employ a private detective when she asked me to. My idea is that you hang around for a couple of days, until things quiet down and she feels safe again. Meanwhile, if you should stumble upon anything — go to it! If you don't — well and good."

My face must have shown something of what I was thinking, for his eyes twinkled and he chuckled.

"Don't, please," he drawled, "get the idea that you aren't to find my father-in-law's would-be assassin if you wish to. You're to have a free hand. Go as far as you like; except that I want you to be around the place as much as possible, so my wife will see you and feel that we are being adequately protected. Beyond that, I don't care what you do. You can apprehend criminals by the carload. As you may have gathered by now, I'm not exactly in love with my wife's father; and he's no more fond of me. To be frank, if hating weren't such an effort — I think I should hate the old devil. But if you want to, and can, catch the man who shot at him, I'd be glad to have you do it. But —"

"All right," I said. "I don't like this job much; but since I'm up here I'll take it on. But, remember, I'm trying all the time."

"Sincerity and earnestness," he showed his teeth in a sardonic smile as we got to our feet, "are very praiseworthy traits."

"So I hear," I growled shortly. "Now let's take a look at Mr. Exon's room."

Gallaway's wife and the nurse were with the invalid, but I examined the room before I asked the occupants any questions.

It was a large room, with three wide windows, opening over the porch; and two doors, one of which gave to the hall, and the other to the adjoining room, occupied by the nurse. This door stood open, with a green Japanese screen across it; and, I was told, was left that way at night, so that the nurse could hear readily if her patient was restless or if he wanted attention.

A man standing on the slate roof of the porch, I found, could have easily leaned across one of the window-sills (if he did not care to step over it into the room) and fired at the man in the bed. To get from the ground to the porch roof would have required but little effort; and the descent would be still easier — he could slide down the roof, let himself go feet-first over the edge, checking his speed with hands and arms spread out on the slate, and drop down to the gravel drive. No trick at all, either coming or going. The windows were unscreened.

The sick man's bed stood just beside the connecting doorway between his room and the nurse's, which, when he was lying down, placed him between the doorway and the window

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from which the shot had been fired. Outside, within long rifle range, there was no building, tree, or eminence of any character from which the bullet that had been dug out of the door-frame could have been fired.

I turned from the room to the occupants, questioning the invalid first. He had been a raw-boned man of considerable size in his health, but now he was wasted and stringy and dead-white. His face was thin and hollow; small beady eyes crowded together against the thin bridge of his nose; his mouth was a colorless gash above a bony projecting chin.

His statement was a marvel of petulant conciseness.

"The shot woke me. I didn't see anything. I don't know anything. I've got a million enemies, most of whose names I can't remember. That's all I can tell you."

He jerked this out crossly, turned his face away, closed his eyes, and refused to speak again.

Mrs. Gallaway and the nurse followed me into the latter's room, where I questioned them. They were of as opposite type as you could find anywhere; and between them there was a certain coolness, an unmistakable hostility which I was able to account for later in the day.

Mrs. Gallaway was perhaps five years older than her husband; dark, strikingly beautiful in a statuesque way, with a worried look in her dark eyes that was particularly noticeable when those eyes rested on her husband. There was no doubt that she was very much in love with him, and the anxiety that showed in her eyes at times — the pains she took to please him in each slight thing during my stay at the Exon house — convinced me that she struggled always with a fear that she was about to lose him.

Mrs. Gallaway could add nothing to what her husband had told me. She had been awakened by the shot, had run to her father's room, had seen nothing — knew nothing — suspected nothing.

The nurse — Barbra Caywood was her name — told the same story, in almost the same words. She had jumped out of bed when awakened by the shot, pushed the screen away from the connecting doorway, and rushed into her patient's room. She was the first one to arrive there, and she had seen nothing but the old man sitting up in bed, roaring and shaking his feeble fists at the window.

This Barbra Caywood was a girl of twenty-one or two, and just the sort that a man would pick to help him get well. A girl of a little under the average height, with an erect figure wherein slimness and roundness got an even break under the stiff white of her uniform; with soft golden hair above a face that was certainly made to be looked at. But she was businesslike and had an air of efficiency, for all her prettiness.

From the nurse's room, Gallaway led me to the kitchen, where I questioned the Chinese cook. Gong Lim was a sad-faced Oriental whose ever-present smile somehow made him look

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more gloomy than ever; and he bowed and smiled and yes-yes'd me from start to finish, and told me nothing.

Adam and Emma Figg — thin and stout, respectively, and both rheumatic — entertained a wide variety of suspicions, directed at the cook and the farm hands, individually and collectively, flitting momentarily from one to the other. They had nothing upon which to base these suspicions, however, except their firm belief that nearly all crimes of violence were committed by foreigners.

The farm hands — two smiling middle-aged and heavily mustached Italians, and a soft-eyed Mexican youth — I found in one of the fields. I talked to them for nearly two hours, and I left with a reasonable amount of assurance that neither of the three had had any part in the shooting.

Dr. Rench had just come down from a visit to his patient when Gallaway and I returned from the fields. He was a little wizened old man with mild manners and eyes, and a wonderful growth of hair on head, brows, cheeks, lips, chin, and nostrils.

The excitement, he said, had retarded Exon's recovery somewhat, but he did not think the set-back would be serious. The invalid's temperature had gone up a little, but he seemed to be improving now.

I followed Dr. Rench out to his machine after he left the others, for a few questions I wanted to put to him in privacy; but the questions might as well have gone unasked for all the good they did me. He could tell me nothing of any value. The nurse, Barbra Caywood, had been secured, he said, from San Francisco, through the usual channels, which made it seem unlikely that she had worked her way into the Exon house for any hidden purpose which might have some connection with the attempt upon Exon's life.

Returning from my talk with the doctor, I came upon Hilary Gallaway and the nurse in the hall, near the foot of the stairs. His arm was resting lightly across her shoulders, and he was smiling down at her. Just as I came through the door, she twisted away, so that his arm slid off, laughed elfishly up into his face, and went on up the stairs.

I did not know whether she had seen me approaching before she eluded the encircling arm or not; nor did I know how long the arm had been there; and both of those questions would make a difference in how their positions were to be construed.

Hilary Gallaway was certainly not a man to allow a girl as pretty as the nurse to lack attention, and he was just as certainly attractive enough in himself to make his advances not too unflattering. Nor did Barbra Caywood impress me as being a girl who would dislike his admiration. But, at that, it was more than likely that there was nothing very serious between them; nothing more than a playful sort of flirtation.

But, no matter what the situation might be in that quarter, it didn't

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have any direct bearing upon the shooting — none that I could see, anyway. But I understood now the strained relations between the nurse and Gallaway's wife.

Gallaway was grinning quizzically at me while I was chasing these thoughts around in my head.

"Nobody's safe with a detective around," he complained.

I grinned back at him. That was the only sort of an answer you could give this bird.

After dinner, Gallaway drove me to Knownburg in his roadster, and set me down on the door-step of the deputy sheriff's house. He offered to drive me back to the Exon house when I had finished my investigations in town, but I did not know how long those investigations would take, so I told him I would hire a car when I was ready to return.

Shand, the deputy sheriff, was a big, slow-spoken, slow-thinking, blond man of thirty or so — just the type best fitted for a deputy sheriff job in a San Joaquin County town.

"I went out to Exon's as soon as Gallaway called me up," he said. "About four-thirty in the morning, I reckon it was when I got there. I didn't find nothing. There weren't no marks on the porch roof, but that don't mean nothing. I tried climbing up and down it myself, and I didn't leave no marks neither. The ground around the house is too firm for footprints to be followed. I found a few, but they didn't lead nowhere; and everybody had run all over the place before I got there, so I couldn't tell who they belonged to.

"Far's I can learn, there ain't been no suspicious characters in the neighborhood lately. The only folks around here who have got any grudge against the old man are the Deemses — Exon beat 'em in a law suit a couple years back — but all of them — the father and both the boys — were at home when the shooting was done."

"How long has Exon been living here?"

"Four — five years, I reckon."

"Nothing at all to work on, then?"

"Nothing I know about."

"What do you know about the Exon family?" I asked.

Shand scratched his head thoughtfully and frowned.

"I reckon it's Hilary Gallaway you're meaning," he said slowly. "I thought of that. The Gallaways showed up here a couple of years after her father had bought the place, and Hilary seems to spend most of his evenings up in Ady's back room, teaching the boys how to play poker. I hear he's fitted to teach them a lot. I don't know, myself. Ady runs a quiet game, so I let 'em alone. But naturally I don't never set in, myself.

"Outside of being a card-hound, and drinking pretty heavy, and making a lot of trips to the city, where he's supposed to have a girl on the string, I don't know nothing much about Hilary. But it's no secret that him and the old man don't hit it off together very well. And then Hilary's room is just across the hall from Exon's, and their

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windows open out on the porch roof just a little apart. But I don't know —"

Shand confirmed what Gallaway had told me about the bullet being .38-caliber; about the absence of any pistol of that caliber on the premises; and about the lack of any reason for suspecting the farm hands or servants.

I put in the next couple hours talking to whomever I could find to talk to in Knownburg; and I learned nothing worth putting down on paper. Then I got a car and driver from the garage, and was driven out to Exon's.

Gallaway had not yet returned from town. His wife and Barbra Caywood were just about to sit down to a light luncheon before retiring, so I joined them. Exon, the nurse said, was asleep, and had spent a quiet evening. We talked for a while — until about half-past twelve — and then went to our rooms.

My room was next to the nurse's, on the same side of the hall that divided the second story in half. I sat down and wrote my report for the day, smoked a cigar, and then — the house being quiet by this time — put a gun and a flashlight in my pockets, went downstairs, and out the kitchen door.

The moon was just coming up, lighting the grounds vaguely, except for the shadows cast by house, outbuildings, and the several clumps of shrubbery. Keeping in these shadows as much as possible, I explored the grounds, finding everything as it should be.

The lack of any evidence to the contrary pointed to last night's shot having been fired — either accidentally, or in fright at some fancied move of Exon's — by a burglar, who had been entering the sick man's room through a window. If that were so, then there wasn't one chance in a thousand of anything happening tonight. But I felt restless and ill at ease, nevertheless.

Gallaway's roadster was not in the garage. He had not returned from Knownburg. Beneath the farm hand's window I paused until snores in three distinct keys told me that they were all safely abed.

After an hour of this snooping around, I returned to the house. The luminous dial of my watch registered 2:35 as I stopped outside the Chinese cook's door to listen to his regular breathing.

Upstairs, I paused at the door of the Figgs' room, until my ear told me that they were sleeping. At Mrs. Gallaway's door I had to wait several minutes before she sighed and turned in bed. Barbra Caywood was breathing deeply and strongly, with the regularity of a young animal whose sleep is without disturbing dreams. The invalid's breath came to me with the evenness of slumber and the rasping of the pneumonia convalescent.

This listening tour completed, I returned to my room.

Still feeling wide-awake and restless, I pulled a chair up to a window, and sat looking at the moonlight on the river — which twisted just below the house so as to be visible from this side — smoking another cigar, and

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turning things over in my mind — to no great advantage.

Outside there was no sound.

Suddenly down the hall came the heavy explosion of a gun being fired indoors!

I threw myself across the room, out into the hall.

A woman's voice filled the house with its shriek — high, frenzied.

Barbra Caywood's door was unlocked when I reached it. I slammed it open. By the light of the moonbeams that slanted past her window, I saw her sitting upright in the center of her bed. She wasn't beautiful now. Her face was distorted, twisted with terror. The scream was just dying in her throat.

All this I got in the flash of time that it took me to put a running foot across her sill.

Then another shot crashed out — in Exon's room.

The girl's face jerked up — so abruptly that it seemed her neck must snap — she clutched both hands to her breast — and fell face-down among the bedclothes.

I don't know whether I went through, over, or around the screen that stood in the connecting doorway. I was circling Exon's bed. He lay on the floor on his side, facing a window. I jumped over him — leaned out the window.

In the yard that was bright now under the moon, nothing moved. There was no sound of flight.

Presently, while my eyes still searched the surrounding country, the farm hands, in their underwear, came running bare-footed from the direction of their quarters. I called down to them, stationing them at points of vantage.

Meanwhile, behind me, Gong Lim and Adam Figg had put Exon back in his bed, while Mrs. Gallaway and Emma Figg tried to check the blood that spurted from a hole in Barbra Caywood's side.

I sent Adam Figg to the telephone, to wake the doctor and the deputy sheriff, and then I hurried down to the grounds.

Stepping out of the door, I came face to face with Hilary Gallaway, coming from the direction of the garage. His face was flushed, and his breath was eloquent of the refreshments that had accompanied the game in Ady's back room; but his step was steady enough, and his smile was as lazy as ever.

"What's the excitement?" he asked.

"Same as last night! Meet anybody on the road? Or see anybody leaving here?"

"No."

"All right. Get in that bus of yours, and burn up the road in the other direction. Stop anybody you meet going away from here or who looks wrong! Got a gun?"

He spun on his heel with nothing of indolence.

"One in my car," he called over his shoulder, as he broke into a run.

The farm hands still at their posts, I combed the grounds from east to west and from north to south. I realized

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that I was spoiling my chance of finding footprints when it would be light enough to see them; but I was banking on the man I wanted still being close at hand. And then Shand had told me that the ground was unfavorable for tracing prints, anyway.

On the gravel drive in front of the house I found the pistol from which the shots had been fired — a cheap .38-caliber revolver, slightly rusty, smelling freshly of burnt powder, with three empty shells and three that had not been fired in it.

Besides that I found nothing. The murderer — from what I had seen of the hole in the girl's side, I called him that — had vanished completely.

Shand and Dr. Rench arrived together, just as I was finishing my fruitless search. A little later, Hilary Gallaway came back — empty-handed.

Breakfast that morning was a melancholy meal, except to Hilary Gallaway. He refrained from jesting openly about the night's excitement; but his eyes twinkled whenever they met mine, and I knew he thought it a tremendously good joke for the shooting to have taken place right under my nose. During his wife's presence at the table, however, he was almost grave, as if not to offend her.

Mrs. Gallaway left the table shortly, and Dr. Rench joined us. He said that both of his patients were in as good shape as could be expected, and he thought both would recover.

The bullet had barely grazed the girl's ribs and breast bone, going through the flesh and muscles of her chest, in on the right side and out again, on the left. Except for the shock and the loss of blood, she was not in danger, although unconscious.

Exon was sleeping, the doctor said; so Shand and I crept up into his room to examine it. The first bullet had gone into the door-frame, about four inches above the one that had been fired the night before. The second bullet had pierced the Japanese screen, and, after passing through the girl, had lodged in the plaster of the wall. We dug out both bullets — they were of .38-caliber. Both had been apparently fired from the vicinity of one of the windows — either just inside or just outside.

Shand and I grilled the Chinese cook, the farm hands, and the Figgs, unmercifully that day. But they came through it standing up — there was nothing to fix the shooting on any of them.

And all day long that damned Hilary Gallaway followed me from pillar to post, with a mocking glint in his eyes that said plainer than words, "I'm the logical suspect. Why don't you put me through your little third degree?" But I grinned back, and asked him nothing.

Shand had to go to town that afternoon. He called me up on the telephone later, and told me that Gallaway had left Knownburg early enough that morning to have arrived home fully half an hour before the shooting, if he had driven at his usual fast pace.

The day passed — too rapidly —

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and I found myself dreading the coming of night. Two nights in succession Exon's life had been attempted — and now the third night was coming.

At dinner Hilary Gallaway announced that he was going to stay home this evening. Knownburg, he said, was tame in comparison; and he grinned at me.

Dr. Rench left after the meal, saying that he would return as soon as possible, but that he had two patients on the other side of town whom he must visit. Barbra Caywood had returned to consciousness, but had been extremely hysterical, and the doctor had given her an opiate. She was asleep now. Exon was resting easily except for a high temperature.

I went up to Exon's room for a few minutes after the meal, and tried him out with a gentle question or two. But he refused to answer them, and he was too sick for me to press him.

He asked how the girl was.

"The doc says she's in no particular danger. Just loss of blood and shock. If she doesn't rip her bandages off and bleed to death in one of her hysterical spells, he says, he'll have her on her feet in a couple weeks."

Mrs. Gallaway came in then, and I went downstairs again, where I was seized by Gallaway, who insisted with bantering gravity that I tell him about some of the mysteries I had solved. He was enjoying my discomfort to the limit. He kidded me for about an hour, and had me burning up inside; but I managed to grin back with a fair pretense of indifference.

When his wife joined us presently — saying that both of the invalids were sleeping — I made my escape from her tormenting husband, saying that I had some writing to do. But I didn't go to my room.

Instead, I crept stealthily into the girl's room, crossed to a clothespress that I had noted earlier in the day, and planted myself in it. By leaving the door open the least fraction of an inch, I could see through the connecting doorway — from which the screen had been removed — across Exon's bed, and out of the window from which three bullets had already come, and the Lord only knew what else might come.

Time passed, and I was stiff from standing still. But I had expected that.

Twice Mrs. Gallaway came up to look at her father and the nurse. Each time I shut my closet door entirely as soon as I heard her tiptoeing steps in the hall. I was hiding from *everybody*.

She had just gone from her second visit, when, before I had time to open my door again, I heard a faint rustling, and a soft padding on the floor. Not knowing what it was or where it was, I was afraid to push the door open.

In my narrow hiding-place I stood still and waited.

The padding was recognizable now — quiet footsteps, coming nearer. They passed not far from my clothespress door.

I waited.

An almost inaudible rustling. A pause. The softest and faintest of tearing sounds.

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I came out of the closet — my gun in my hand.

Standing beside the girl's bed, leaning over her unconscious form, was old Talbert Exon, his face flushed with fever, his night shirt hanging limply around his wasted legs. One of his hands still rested upon the bedclothes he had turned down from her body. The other hand held a narrow strip of adhesive tape, with which her bandages had been fixed in place, and which he had just torn off.

He snarled at me, and both his hands went toward the girl's bandages.

The crazy, feverish glare of his eyes told me that the threat of the gun in my hand meant nothing to him. I jumped to his side, plucked his hands aside, picked him up in my arms, and carried him — kicking, clawing and swearing — back to his bed.

Then I called the others.

Hilary Gallaway, Shand — who had come out from town again — and I sat over coffee and cigarettes in the kitchen, while the rest of the household helped Dr. Rench battle for Exon's life. The old man had gone through enough excitement in the last three days to kill a healthy man, let alone a pneumonia convalescent.

"But why should the old devil want to kill her?" Gallaway asked me.

"Search me," I confessed, a little testily perhaps. "I don't know why he wanted to kill her, but it's a cinch that he did. The gun was found just about where he could have thrown it when he heard me coming. I was in the girl's room when she was shot, and I got to Exon's window without wasting much time, and I saw nothing. You, yourself, driving home from Knownburg, and arriving here right after the shooting, didn't see anybody leave by the road; and I'll take an oath that nobody could have left in any other direction without either one of the farm hands or me seeing them.

"And then, tonight, I told Exon that the girl would recover if she didn't tear off her bandages; which, while true enough, gave him the idea that she had been trying to tear them off. And from that he built up a plan of tearing them off himself — knowing that she had been given an opiate, perhaps — and thinking that everybody would believe she had torn them off herself. And he was putting that plan in execution — had torn off one piece of tape — when I stopped him. He shot her intentionally, and that's flat. Maybe I couldn't prove it in court without knowing why; but I know he did. But the doc says he'll hardly live to be tried; he killed himself trying to kill the girl."

"Maybe you're right," and Gallaway's mocking grin flashed at me, "but you're a hell of a detective just the same. Why didn't you suspect me?"

"I did," I grinned back, "but not enough."

"Why not? You may be making a mistake," he drawled. "You know my room is just across the hall from his, and I could have left my window,

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crept across the porch, fired at him, and then run back to my room, on that first night.

"And on the second night — when you were here — you ought to know that I left Knownburg in plenty of time to have come out here, parked my car down the road a bit, fired those two shots, crept around in the shadow of the house, ran back to my car, and then come driving innocently up to the garage. You should know also that my reputation isn't any too good — that I'm supposed to be a bad egg; and you do know that I don't like the old man. And for a motive, there is the fact that my wife is Exon's only heir. I hope," he raised his eyebrows in burlesqued pain, "that you don't think I have any moral scruples against a well-placed murder now and then."

I laughed.

"I don't."

"Well, then?"

"If Exon had been killed that first night, and I had come up here, you'd be doing your joking behind bars long before this. And if he'd been killed the second night, even, I might have grabbed you. But I don't figure you as a man who'd bungle so easy a job — not twice, anyway. You wouldn't have missed, and then run away, leaving him alive."

He shook my hand gravely.

"It is comforting to have one's few virtues appreciated."

Before Talbert Exon died he sent for me. He wanted to die, he said, with his curiosity appeased; and so we traded information. I told him how I had come to suspect him and he told me why he had tried to kill Barbra Caywood.

Fourteen years ago he had killed his wife; not for the insurance, as he had been suspected of doing, but in a fit of jealousy. However, he had so thoroughly covered up the proofs of his guilt that he had never been brought to trial; but the murder had weighed upon him, to the extent of becoming an obsession.

He knew that he would never give himself away consciously — he was too shrewd for that — and he knew that proof of his guilt could never be found. But there was always the chance that some time, in delirium, in his sleep, or when drunk, he might tell enough to bring him to the gallows.

He thought upon this angle too often, until it became a morbid fear that always hounded him. He had given up drinking — that was easy — but there was no way of guarding against the other things.

And one of them, he said, had finally happened. He had got pneumonia, and for a week he had been out of his head, and he had talked. Coming out of that week's delirium, he had questioned the nurse. She had given him vague answers, would not tell him what he had talked about, what he had said. And then, in unguarded moments, he had discovered that her eyes rested upon him with loathing — with intense repulsion.

He knew then that he had babbled of his wife's murder; and he set about laying plans for removing the nurse

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before she repeated what she had heard. For so long as she remained in his house, he counted himself safe. She would not tell strangers, and it might be that for a while she would not tell anyone. Professional ethics would keep her quiet, perhaps; but he could not let her leave his house with her knowledge of his secret.

Daily and in secret, he had tested his strength, until he knew himself strong enough to walk about the room a little, and to hold a revolver steady. His bed was fortunately placed for his purpose — directly in line with one of the windows, the connecting door, and the girl's bed. In an old bond-box in his closet — and nobody but he had ever seen the things in that box — was a revolver; a revolver that could not possibly be traced to him.

On the first night, he had taken this gun out, stepped back from his bed a little, and fired a bullet into the door-frame. Then he had jumped back into bed, concealing the gun under the blankets — where none thought to look for it — until he could return it to its box.

That was all the preparation he had needed. He had established an attempted murder directed against himself; and he had shown that a bullet fired at him could easily go near — and therefore through — the connecting doorway.

On the second night, he had waited until the house had seemed quiet. Then he had peeped through one of the cracks in the Japanese screen at the girl, whom he could see in the reflected light from the moon. He had found, though, that when he stepped far enough back from the screen for it to escape powder marks, he could not see the girl, not while she was lying down. So he had fired first into the door-frame — near the previous night's bullet — to awaken her.

She had sat up in bed immediately, screaming, and he had shot her. He had intended firing another shot into her body — to make sure of her death — but my approach had made that impossible, and had made concealment of the gun impossible; so, with what strength he had left, he had thrown the revolver out of the window.

He died that afternoon, and I returned to San Francisco.

But that was not quite the end of the story.

In the ordinary course of business, the Agency's bookkeeping department sent Gallaway a bill for my services. With the check that he sent by return mail, he enclosed a letter to me, from which I quote a paragraph:

> I don't want to let you miss the cream of the whole affair. The lovely Caywood, when she recovered, denied that Exon had talked of murder or any other crime during his delirium. The cause of the distaste with which she might have looked at him afterward, and the reason she would not tell him what he had said, was that his entire conversation during that week of delirium had consisted of an uninterrupted stream of obscenities and blasphemies, which seem to have shocked the girl through and through.

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ST. CHRISTOPHER ENGAGES THE DRAGON

Edgar Allan Poe was the immortal first: he wrote the world's first detective story, and through the medium of that and three additional tales, he laid down all the major principles of the form. When we think of the classic storytelling pattern — the eccentric amateur sleuth and his worshipful stooge — we think back to Poe. When we think of all the main arteries of technique — the wrongly suspected person, the sealed room, the surprise solution, the least-likely-person device, the laying of a false trail — we think back to Poe and find the original source of every basic variation in Poe's tetralogy written more than a hundred years ago.

Indeed, if you are ever asked who was the first to do thus-and-so in a detective story, you would be perfectly safe in replying, consistently and automatically, Poe. Even if you are asked who was the first writer to attempt the solution of a real-life murder case, the reply would still be — Poe. In July 1841, a mere three months after the publication of the world's first detective story, Mary Cecilia Rogers was brutally murdered in New York City. "Her death occasioned an intense and long-enduring excitement." The police, in the time-honored fictional tradition, were completely baffled. Poe waited a year; then "with no other means of investigation than the newspapers afforded," he "composed at a distance from the scene of the atrocity" a short story based on the actual facts in the case. This story, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," established Poe as the founder of, to quote Dorothy L. Sayers, "the small band of mystery-writers who have put their skill in deduction to the acid test of a problem which they had not in the first place invented." Although Howard Haycraft states categorically that the Mary Rogers case was never solved, a footnote (which began to appear with the 1845 book-version of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt") clearly indicates the extent of Poe's success: ". . . the confessions of two *persons, made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication* [*of the story*]*, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely* all *the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained."*

What mystery-writers have since joined "the small band" founded by Poe? A small and select society of crimeteers. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle — remember his deductive efforts in behalf of George Edalji and Oscar Slater? John Dickson Carr — remember his trail-blazing full-length re-examination of THE MURDER OF SIR EDMUND GODFREY? *And recently, Lillian de la Torre — her* ELIZABETH IS MISSING *is "the Truth at last made*

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manifest" about the infamous Canning disappearance.

A few others have tried their hand, with varying degrees of success, but the "small band" remains one of the most exclusive coteries in the world. It takes great courage to seek membership, and even greater ability to achieve it. Perhaps that is why, sooner or later, it was inevitable that Christopher Morley would join that honorable company. Mr. Morley is one of the great writers of our time: he is a novelist, poet, essayist, critic, translator, shortstoryist, playwright. He has left his imprint in every field of letters. And now, in memorable fashion, St. Christopher engages the Dragon of real-life detection.

Do not be misled by some of the things Mr. Morley says. For example, in the very beginning of his account of the Consolable Widow, Mr. Morley writes: "The affair Had Everything (except a solution)." That was true — in 1890. Also, near the end of his account, Mr. Morley says there is no final, complete, and sole possible solution in this detective story without a detective. Don't you believe it: there is a solution and there is a detective. Poe waited only one year after the fact; Mr. Morley waited fifty-six years after the fact to turn detective in print, and his achievement is as brilliant as Poe's and Doyle's. There is the stamp of truth in Mr. Morley's solution, a Dupinesque and Holmesian ring to his "three points" and to the deductions therefrom; indeed, the Case of the Consolable Widow perpetuates one of the oldest traditions of the detective story — as only Christopher Morley could enrich and enhance it.

THE CONSOLABLE WIDOW

by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

THE gist of it is this: under what circumstances would a lawyer leave his briefcase behind after calling on a lady client?

Perhaps it's a story for professional men only, for whom a briefcase is almost a limb. The affair Had Everything (except a solution). There were picturesque setting, wild autumn rainstorm to wash blood and footprints, wagonwheels and voices heard in the night, and watchdogs that strangely were not heard. And behind the bizarre and brutal details was the somewhat multiple sex-appeal of a Consolable Widow. Even, if we listen closely, an overtone of literary art, for when one of Connie's letters was read aloud in court it caused in the audience "a murmur of charm and surprise." I'm afraid it loses in translation:

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"Now almost three months without seeing you, without hearing the sound of your voice. Three months? Don't they seem more like three years? Not those former monotone years when I had no thoughts at all, but years full of uncertainty and anguish. Oh absence! Impatience for the return of the well-beloved! To think that one might have him with one, on one's lips, in one's arms, against one's heart — and be telling him I love him in a hundred thousand ways."

It loses also by the fact that Connie (short for Consolable) copied into an account-book the best love letters, both Incoming and Outgoing. Effective passages were used more than once. These were the only accounts she kept with any care.

Enough of prologue. I should add only that two recent reprints of an old story about the Bad Girl and the Bailiff, viz. the murder of Gouffé,* have brought comment which encouraged this *encore*. The present resurrection, also drawn from Bataille, is in a higher social bracket but in some sense a sequel.

I haven't been there, but it sounds like good country. Chantelle, a village of 1300 people, is in the valley of a stream deliciously named the Bouble. The hills slope up toward the great *massif* of Auvergne; there are vineyards to catch the sun, and a little narrow-gauge railway that joins the main P.L.M. line below Moulins. A Blue Guide of 20 years ago credits the toy train with a schedule of 48 miles in 5 hours, but I'm sure it compensates by the pitch and frequency of its shrill whistle. The engine frightens up puffs of white butterflies in the fields, and carries a jack on its bumper in case of trouble. The little station and freight-shed smell of wine-drippings, for the flat-cars are loaded with casks; nothing *tête de cuvée*, probably, but a modest Beaujolais; a bright ruby color with a strawberry taste, sometimes not even bottled but drunk straight from the wood.

Visitors to Chantelle would stop at the modest Hôtel de la Poste to take a glass of the local *cru* and forget their troubles a while. The sun is running its westing down, behind the peaks of the Puy de Dôme; the ruins of the Bourbon castle command the shallow valley. Then they see (I assume it's still there) a smart little villa on the uphill street. It has green blinds, and a tile roof with pigeons. A large walled garden actually includes some of the Bourbon foundations, here overgrown into mounds and rockeries. There is a comic summerhouse like a Chinese pagoda, sandy paths among rose-beds, a lawn, an orchard, a greenhouse and a dove-cot.

* See *The Red and White Girdle* (1931) reprinted by Louis Greenfield in an omnibus volume VARIETY (1944), and by Joseph Henry Jackson in THE PORTABLE MURDER BOOK (1945). Those who might be interested in Albert Bataille's wonderful series of annual volumes, CAUSES CRIMINELLES ET MONDAINES, probably the best crime reporting of its kind, will find him further exploited in my OFF THE DEEP END (1928) and INTERNAL REVENUE (1933). — C. M.

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The mossy wall is 9 feet high and topped with broken bottles; it borders a cobbled alley that leads to a vigneron's wine-press, and there's a neat green door in the wall. And it is that garden door which we softly open — to Sunday evening, October 5, 1890.

One wouldn't expect to be doing legal business in a country village on Sunday evening, but M. Lépine was really troubled. His very special client Mme. Achet (whom we have nicknamed Connie; Bataille never tells us her first name) has got her affairs in a mess. So much so that she prefers him to call in the evening, to avoid publicity. I spoke of M. Lépine as a lawyer, but he wasn't quite that: he was the village *notaire*, for which we have no exact counterpart. The French notary (an officer of the state) seems to be a combination of accountant, trustee, legal counsellor and business agent; more like what is called in England a solicitor, or the Scots "Writer to the Signet." At any rate he has long handled the affairs of the gay little widow. Now they seem to approach a crisis. While M. Lépine is considering which of a number of papers to put in his briefcase for this Sunday evening call, we can catch up with some of the background that he knows by heart.

Mme. Achet, now age 32, was born to the excellent name of Prévost, daughter of a well-to-do business man in Paris. At 19 she was given to a husband 20 years her senior; one of those wedlocks that justified the cynical French saying "*Il-y-a de mariages agréables; il n'y en a point de délicieux.*" M. Achet had a thrifty tutoring establishment in the neighborhood of the Sorbonne, where he coached backward boys for college entrance. We can speculate about that, but it would be only guesswork. At any rate the bride brought with her a handsome dowry, the ambitious don had saved some francs of his own, and three years after marriage they settled in the coquettish villa at Chantelle — perhaps because Mme. Achet's younger sister had married the druggist there, M. Demotte. Bataille says M. Achet was fed up with chewing Latin grammar. But he now began studying more dangerous declensions, those of the stock market. He was an imprudent investor, and when he died in 1885 he left his inexperienced wife with two children, a costly ménage, and an embarrassed estate.

But the young widow was by no means inclined to retrench. The notary Lépine, a man of her husband's age, had charge of her business; let him do the worrying. She had expectations from an uncle; and more tangible help from other sources. We must be a little more delicate than Bataille in our commentary, but after the monotone years with the tutor Connie began to sparkle. Perhaps there was a pathos in this frolic, for the older of her two children, a little girl, had died lately. At any rate she was living beyond any visible means of support, even making occasional trips to Paris. The narrow-minded

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little train trundled her down the valley of the Bouble, and perhaps there was censure in its shrill scream as she got aboard the main line at Varennes. The rest of the way was on broader gauge. She even kept a room — what is so inaccurately called a *pied-à-terre* — in the Boulevard de Strasbourg; certainly not a fashionable neighborhood, but convenient for her friend M. Delorme, the cashier of the Bee (Abeille) Insurance. He was a sturdy and reliable fellow with a spreading chestnut moustache; it must have been her idea, not his, that their correspondences were signed *Vivien* and *Ninette*. Delorme's tropes of sentiment probably followed the obvious suggestion of bees and honey.

Cashier Delorme was only one of Connie's invisible assets. The fiscal-minded Lépine, if he had known all details, might have said she liked to pyramid her transactions. To some of her friends the court granted a benignant anonymity: for instance Dr. X——, to whom "she gave herself in his clinic"; another we hear of only as one of those myriad mysterious Frenchmen called functionaries. Inescapably important was young M. Albert Thaunié, several years younger than herself, and rich, and not far away. He lived at the Château de Blanzat, where "he threw money out of the windows," he was expert with horses and dogs and sports, and spent much time hunting in the wilds of the Cévennes, where R. L. Stevenson only a few years before had travelled so harmlessly with a donkey.

But we must get back to the papers in M. Lépine's briefcase, which dealt with less romantic matter. There was the mortgage on the property which he had arranged for Mme. Achet. There were notes of the various advances he had made to her from his own funds, mounting now to 10,000 francs — over $2000, a lot of money. There were memos about the securities in her husband's estate, whose yield had now dropped to about $600 a year.

There had been a good deal of talk among the village *fournisseurs*, for Connie still lived high; old Françoise, the maid (who was "*rien d'une soubrette*"), took in more game and fish at that garden door than any other servant in town. Since Lépine drew the dividends and paid the bills, there must have been plenty of papers in the dossier. I see him spreading them out under the lamp in his sitting room that Sunday evening, deciding which it would be worthwhile to lay before his irresponsible client. A tiresome fellow, poor Lépine, associated in Connie's mind with tedious budgetings. Not an attractive figure: we happen to know that he weighed 240 pounds; and worse, he had a goitre. What we don't know, and never can, was whether he had been entirely sincere in his loans and reproaches. There is at least a possibility he might not have been dismayed at Connie's deficit. The mortgage principal was soon due; he might buy it up himself and take over that attractive property? But a French notary, an officer

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bonded to the State, is more likely to commit carnal delict than fiscal. He is more likely to attack his client's person than her purse. In settlement of the account, why not take over Connie herself? Lépine visualizes her: nimble, brunette, appetizingly plump; not exactly pretty, but *gamine, piquante, mine chiffonnée.* Once he had read one of Paul de Kock's amusing novels about Parisian modistes: that was what she was like. Bataille, who had an eye for such things, describes the impudent little hat Connie wore at the trial. You couldn't translate it, any more than translate the hat itself to another head. It was part of her:

> *. . . le chapeau tout mignon, fait d'un rien, de quelques plumes et d'un peu de tulle sur une forme lilliputienne.*

This particular wisp of headgear Lépine never saw; but he had seen plenty like it. He sighs a little — or is it a grunt? — and puts 7200 francs in banknotes into the briefcase, no one knows why. He says goodnight to Mme. Lépine and his law-student son, sets off down the dark street. Were the 7200 francs cash to be a set-off against the I.O.U. for 10,000 he was going to force her to sign? All we know is the extraordinary fact that when he returned he had left the briefcase at Connie's. He said he forgot it. Connie said he left it of his own free-will; but she added, later, the deathless remark: "There are things of which one does not speak too categorically."

I can't be too categorical either. I have to accept as fact what Bataille accepted; but since I'm not liable, as he was, to "process of diffamation," I can redouble his informative spades. It would help if we knew that this Sunday evening meeting took place because Connie's wealthy uncle M. Moreau (former deputy) had died October 4. But when did she learn that? By telegram on Saturday, or by post on Monday? And how seriously did Lépine take her assertion that Uncle Moreau was going to leave her a legacy? Actually, we learn later, the uncle didn't.

What we do know is that when Lépine retrieved the briefcase it contained neither the 7200 francs, nor the signed acknowledgment of his client's debt. I like to linger on the physical briefcase, one of those French portfolios, a foldover of wellworn leather and no handle, always hugged close to stout M. Lépine's notarial breast. Briefcases have played a great part in my own life, I know how dear they can be; I have even used their scuffed and outworn hides for the binding of books. The briefcase is the professional man's breviary, his bourse, his book of common prayer. Connie said some astonishing things under question, which Bataille is too prudent to underline; one of them was "if you knew all about briefcases, you'd have the secret of many things."

My guess is that Françoise, the *bonne à tout faire*, carried the briefcase back to Lépine's office when she was sent to do the marketing on Mon-

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day. I think so because that same day (presumably while the *bonne* was out) the big carving knife disappeared from the kitchen dresser, and Françoise was puzzled.

Other things happened that day. Lépine made a note in his books "*Remis à Mme. Achet 7200 fr.*" If we knew just how to interpret *Remis* (it baffles Bataille too) it would help. Paid? Credited? Cancelled? Written off? And about the same time Connie was sitting in her little salon, opening onto the garden terrace, writing in that French purple ink on onion-skin paper a letter to Cashier Delorme. He is to go to their little honeycomb on the Boulevard Strasbourg and get her revolver, have it repaired, and mail it to her. To M. Delorme's astonishment her letter enclosed a 1000 franc note, "for expenses."

Cashier Delorme knew (no one better) that his Queen Bee's fiscal methods were temperamental. He supposed she didn't want anyone in Chantelle to know she had so large a bill, and wanted it changed. Conscientious friend, he mailed her back ten 100-franc notes, but took his time about the revolver.

M. Lépine is also using pen and ink. Does he think he has paid too much for what he got, or didn't get? He is trying to recoup at least part of the 7200 francs. There is some to and fro about this, but the payoff is that Lépine says the matter must be settled by October 15. Is that some kind of quarter-day or statutory deadline in France? Anyhow Connie tells him to come to see her that day about 5 P.M.

A week goes by and Connie hasn't received the revolver. On October 13 she telegraphs M. Delorme the cryptic message: *Need silk by tomorrow*. Delorme guesses what she means, mails it at once, what we would now call parcel post special handling. He marks the parcel *Metallic Tubes;* an accurate minded man.

In case, very unlikely, anyone should check me up, I must here mention discrepant data in Bataille. There were many queer inconsistencies in this case, and it seems that in his hasty memoranda Bataille got confused between 17,000 francs and the 17th of October. No one with a spider-web mind will be surprised by that. So I don't know, and it doesn't matter now, whether the crisis came on October 15 or October 17. The testimony gives both dates.

Whichever it was, at 5 P.M., as appointed, M. Lépine went to the *villa très coquette*. He rang at the front door, with its handsome iron grill. Mme. Achet sent word, by Françoise, that she was having a fitting with her dressmaker and couldn't see him. I imagine both indignation and fantasy in the mind of Lépine as he listens to Françoise at the door. "She can't see you now, she's all undressed, the couturière is running the tape around her." Whether as methodical notary or lickchop wooer, what could annoy him more? I myself am annoyed not to know what kind of costume was being measured, or fitted, or altered in

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haste. A little traveling *tailleur*, of warm tweed, suitable for a carriage drive late at night? Informed on this point we might have a clue to Mme. Achet's plans for that evening.

It has been a bright autumn day; Connie was out in the garden that afternoon, cutting the late roses. But now, at dusk, it has turned windy, thickening for rain. There's a pleasant shine of lamplight from Françoise's kitchen, and a warm whiff of some *gibier* on the stove. Perhaps M. Lépine suggests he can wait a while, thinking he might be asked to share a dish of stew with his client. But hardfaced Françoise says "She's going to dinner with her sister."

"Then I'll come back later," he says angrily.

Connie calls down from her bedroom — or so she insisted later — "You can't come tonight. I'm spending the evening with the Demottes" (her sister and brother-in-law). "I won't be back until late. Come tomorrow morning."

The dressmaker said nothing; her mouth was probably full of pins, and remained so, for her testimony, that might have been critical, does not seem ever to have been taken. But whether he made it plain to them or not, M. Lépine decided he would come back about 10 o'clock that night. He lumbered off, hugging his briefcase, down the village street, turning his collar against a sensation of chill. When he told his family he would have to go out again that evening and where, Madame Lépine was anxious. "I don't like it when you have to go to that house. I don't know why, I always think of Gouffé" (referring to the case that had made such a stir the year before).

The notary, his wife, and his law-student son played cards peacefully that evening. When he left the house, soon after ten o'clock, Madame Lépine had gone to bed, but she called out to him, "I think you ought to take your revolver." He did; but it may have been because the annual wine-harvest fair was to open the next day. There were rough characters in town, peddlers and itinerant pitchmen and grifters, and plenty of drinking in the little bistros. It was a black night now, and pouring rain; a wrong time for any mature businessman to be abroad, thought Mme. Lépine. But the notary insisted that his client was expecting him. He had to call on her so late because she did not wish anyone to guess how involved were her affairs.

Mme. Lépine was heartened by the fact that her husband left the lamp burning in his bedroom. Knowing his thrifty spirit, that must mean he wouldn't be gone long.

Mme. Achet, meanwhile, had been spending the evening as advertised, at the Demottes. According to Adeline Demotte her sister was in no hurry to leave, she wanted to continue the music they were enjoying, but the druggist was tired and wished his bed. When Françoise called for her, with the big umbrella, they pushed Connie out into the storm.

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Through the cobbled streets, dimly glistening, we imagine those figures converging on the bijou villa. But from here we pass into a chapter of low visibility, as obscure as the night itself. The facts are few but horrid.

Françoise, probably muttering "*un sale temps*," locked the front door, climbed to her room in the attic and heard nothing until morning. Connie was more leisurely. She undressed, made sure that the 7-year-old Ali (which I take to be a nickname, perhaps for Alexandre) was asleep in his room adjoining hers. Then she went into the little salon (on the same floor) which overlooked the garden terrace, "to put down her things" (*déposer mes effets*), when she heard a tapping at the window, and her name called. She opened without hesitation. It was M. Lépine.

"What on earth are you doing here?"

"I've come to settle my accounts," and he tried to force his way in. She says he threatened her with a revolver. Her own weapon, the "metallic tubes" mailed by Cashier Delorme, was lying on her desk. She ran for it, they wrestled together in the open window and fell onto the terrace. She fired her revolver, at random, and Lépine fled into the garden. She followed, shooting to hit. At the last shot he fell over a terrace, or a fragment of the old Bourbon wall, a drop of three meters.

She was in such a state (she says) that she ran madly round the garden thinking the villain might still pursue. But he lay still. Well he might; as M. Waldeck-Rousseau remarked later, she had made a bullseye on him five times out of six: in the spine, left shoulderblade, throat, right eye, and left lung. This marksmanship, to accept her own story, while running wildly through rain and dark.

She approached and found him dead. She returned to the house for her raincoat. She took the carving knife from the ledge of the pigeon-house where it was conveniently lying (she had left it there after cutting roses that afternoon, and sliced the corpse's throat — a slash 20 centimeters long and 7 deep, right through the "voluminous goiter" as Bataille gruesomely insists. She removed his watch and papers, and carried (not dragged) the body (240 lbs.) fifty feet into the alley alongside the garden wall, where it lay under the sluice of a rainspout, draining and bleaching all night. She raked sand over the bloodstains, wiped her slippers with a napkin, washed the carving knife and put it back in the kitchen drawer. She concealed 7000 francs in bank notes in a fold of the hearthrug. Then, in her own words, she threw the watch and papers down the watercloset, closed the window, and fell into bed. She had defended her honor, and slept sound until 9:30 A.M.

The purpose of these extraordinary maneuvers, she averred, was to suggest slaughter and robbery by prowlers of the night. This account, here so briefly summarized, she main-

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tained unshaken during nine hours of questioning at the trial. Some of her answers were very brisk: for instance, as Holmes would have put it, the curious incident of the dogs in the night-time. There were two dogs who usually slept on the terrace. Where were they that night, or why didn't they give alarm? Connie's reply: "*Il leur arrivait quelquefois de découcher*" — "sometimes they slept out."

But poor Mme. Lépine didn't sleep much that night. She kept waking, noticing always that the lamp in her husband's room was still burning. Finally, at dawn (which came clean, after the downpour) she sent her son to search, and herself went to the house of the priest for advice. Her thought, rather charmingly expressed, was that Mme. Achet had "sequestrated" her husband, in order to compel him to return home by daylight and cause a scandal. This is my evidence for thinking Mme. Lépine a good wife: she had loyally and unconsciously picked up her husband's semi-legal jargon.

It was worse than that. The wine-pressers were up at daylight, getting ready for a big day, and already, as young Emmanuel Lépine scouted the Achet villa, his father's body had been found in the alley. The young man came racing back in horror. "They've assassinated him!"

Now let's take up some of the questions that agonized not only Bataille, but two of France's greatest lawyers: M. Waldeck-Rousseau (afterward premier, and defender of De Lesseps in the great Panama Canal case two years later) and M. Demange, eloquent champion of all kinds of female aberration. There is no ascertainable answer to some of these mortal uncertainties, but we have Posterity's only privilege: detached conjecture. We might even be fanciful and wonder if the trouble was partly due to season (the *vendange* or grape harvest) and climate (the bracing and mineral stingo of that upland air). Of Royat, only a few miles away, it was once said "the air would make a bishop bite a barmaid in the neck"; a casual remark that greatly increased Royat's tourist traffic. There are freaks and emanations in that region: at Royat, guide books tell me, there is the *Grotte du Chien* which exhales carbon dioxide enough to asphyxiate a dog, while a man, erect, feels nothing of it. Perhaps the dogs (*Nounou* and *Pioupiou* are my names for them) were stupefied by some noxious geological oxide. But I have my own theory about the dogs, which will appear.

Footprints. By the time the *juge d'instruction* (police magistrate) arrived from Gannat (legal headquarters of the district) all tracks in the garden had been erased, either by rain or carelessness. Here a side-issue of local politics became violent: Dr. Noir, the village physician for 25 years and its mayor for 15, was accused of having overtrodden a footprint that might have been important. This assertion was complicated by the fact that Dr. Noir was a Red Republican,

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and poor old Lépine was the local Tory, and was going to work against him in the coming elections.

Gendarmes. The village police seem to have been as futile as any in fiction. The constable set to watch the house did not notice when Mme. Achet sent young Ali with a parcel for Mme. Demotte, which contained her revolver; nor when Connie's godmother, Mme. Desgranges of Paris, who mysteriously happened to be in Chantelle at the time (at the Demottes'?) took away a bundle of papers and money and a box of cartridges, confided to her by her godchild, and burned the papers. M. Lépine's office file was found to be empty of all documents in the Achet dossier.

Corpse. Was poor Lépine's throat cut while dead or still alive? Four doctors divided two to two on this. Could the body be *carried* (not dragged) by so small a woman as Connie? The police tried experiments on citizens of large stature hefted by women of Connie's size; inconclusive. The prosecution was outraged that Connie had never been "confronted" with the draggled blood-drained corpse; but there was plenty of it on the table of *pièces justificatives:* his stained enormous clothes; his revolver, found in the garden; and, bottled in alcohol, his "larynx," including the horrible carved goiter.

Bruises. Connie was shy about physical examination, which was odd, because it was the only confirmation of her story. She was found to have contusions on her arms, thighs, hocks (*jarrets*), shins, and right calf.

Throatcut. Again the doctors disagreed; could any woman have achieved, with one slash (as Connie insisted) such a wound in the throat? Her defence might have been, a widow has to learn to do the carving.

Garden Door. How could Lépine have entered unless the door in the wall, usually kept locked, was purposely left open? The jury was asked to consider three questions:

Was it a deliberate ambush, perhaps with an accomplice?

Was Connie defending her honor against an outrageous and unexpected assault?

Or did the notary's visit coincide malapropos with the arrival of an *expected* lover?

To these we should add two of Waldeck-Rousseau's shrewd inquiries: Can we blame the notary if he wanted a bite at the apple which so many had already tasted? And if she really picked up the body and carried it, why can't she describe how it was done?

Overheard. The child Ali (age 7), whose testimony was charitably taken not in open court but privately, under conditions of privilege, said he had been waked by hearing men's voices, indoors. Neighbor Martin, a carpenter, thought he heard shots but prudently stayed in bed. Widow Grandjean, "wrinkled like a winter apple," also heard what sounded like shots but told her beads again and pulled the quilt over her head. The tanner Auguste Melin, whose vats were nearby, got up during the night because

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he had some hides in pickle. He heard wagonwheels, hoarse voices, footsteps, and sounds of struggle. He heard the mysterious ejaculation "*Han!*" (as pronounced in French) and a cry "*Laissez-le là!*" He supposed that referred to a wagonload of grapes left near the neighboring wine-press. There were also bangs that might have been thumps on a door. How would you translate "*Laissez-le là*"? It might be Leave *it* there, it might be Leave *him* there. Melin did whatever a tanner does, and hurried back to bed. Who blames him? — he was in his nightshirt, no trousers on, and it was pelting rain. But his brother Antoine, a farmer, clouded the issue: he said that Auguste had told him he thought he recognized, in the shouts in the alley, one particular voice that rolled its r's (*grasseyait*) in the Auvergne accent. It was the miller Bouladon. And that brought out the strange fact that when the famous lawyers came to Moulins for the trial, Bouladon had said, drinking at a pub, "The murder of Lépine? Shucks, I was there."

Special Train. This halted everything. The judge called a recess while they "heated up a special train" (*un train spécial est immédiatement chauffé pour aller chercher Bouladon à Chantelle.*) Can't you hear the narrow-gauge line whistling with excitement? Meanwhile I imagine Maître Demange and Maître Waldeck-Rousseau, taking a tiffin together at the Hôtel de la Poste, discussing with cheer and wit any other case but this; each privately thinking what surprises he has to spring on the other. Waldeck-Rousseau is remembering Connie's sprightly letters to various lovers: *par exemple*, to Dr. X —— of the unidentified clinic: "Let me come to you and be your little doctor in skirts." — And Maître Demange, never more *en verve* (says Bataille, who had listened to him often) is planning how best to introduce the fact that Connie had never taken Lépine seriously; she had called him, in English, a "fat goose."

Rolling R's. If you start picking at any knot in the great human snarl, you're sure to loosen strings into all sorts of trouble. Here's the poor little miller Bouladon, for whom the special train has been heated. Bataille says he looks "sad and poor, constrained and embarrassed, this has been for him a day of strong emotions." His testimony is pathetic. He admits he may have said something silly about the crime, to increase his importance. Ever since one of his children fell into the fire and was burned to death he has been a bit gaga, and after a drink or two he talks wildly. Moreover, the night of the tragedy he was at home: his wife was dying. The court keeps Bouladon talking so tanner Melin can estimate the roll of the r's. They are throaty enough, but now Melin isn't sure if that was the voice. No one seems to have remarked that in the critical phrase overheard — "*Assez! assez! Laissez-le là!*" there aren't any r's.

Dorothy Sayers, in one of her most

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brilliant books (THE MIND OF THE MAKER, p. 188) has suggested that the human passion for detective stories is due to the universal hankering for "a final, complete, and sole possible solution." There is nothing of that in this detective story without a detective. It is a paradigm of perplexity; of the uncertainties of mortal witness, especially when (like a conference of Foreign Ministers) it has to be filtered by translation. How shall we estimate Connie: by the impudent little hat, or by her attempt (locked in jail at Gannat in a long cold winter) to commit suicide? She hoarded lumps of coal sent for the stove in her cell; hid them in her mattress, and tried to gas herself with them. — Or do we estimate her by Honeyman Delorme's statement, that when she asked him to send the revolver he was no more surprised than if she had asked for an umbrella?

No wonder I wish we still had William Bolitho to write about these things; he understood, what Woollcott and Roughead and Edmund Pearson never did, that crime is something more than a chance for the literary tipstaff to be jocular. How do historians, so cool and vicious with postpositive wit, sift their grains of judgment? The tanner Mélin heard blows, bangs, or thuds, and the cry "*Han!*" How do you interpret "*Han?*" Larousse says it's the dull grunt of a man striking a blow. The child Ali, half-awake — and is seven years an age of verdict or of fantasy? — thinks he heard M. Lépine shout "*Holà! Holà!*" What would you say about that? Look it up in Larousse, or overhear it in a night of rain and murder? Does it mean *Hullo, Hullo!* or *Stop, Stop!*? If you don't know the timing and the tone of voice, you know nothing.

To simplify, I come back to the briefcase. I just don't believe that the notary forgot it. As Kipling said,

> Does the Maid forget both jewel and gem,
> Or the Bride her wedding dress?
> Does the Jew forget Jerusalem,
> Or the Printer forget the Press?

If Lépine left it behind it could only have been as part of what the French call a transactional formula. It was an earnest, a symbol, of favors already, he thought, overdue. It was a token of something not taken; an excuse to come again. When he did, with his fatal jest "I've come to collect," did he happen into another appointment? Connie was bored with bank balances and niggling notaries. She'd had thirteen years of tutoring long ago. Now she had her eye on something more solid, the Château Blanzat. Any moment now the wheels would grind up the cobbled alley; not a wagon of grapes but a more personal harvest. Why else the gun, the broken appointment, the dressmaker in haste, the careful alibi *chez Demotte?*

Bataille, always acute for drama, hates to let us down at the end. The jury, compromised by the rigor of Waldeck-Rousseau versus the wit of Demange, were out only 15 minutes.

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Connie was found guilty, with extenuating circumstances. "Still mysterious and impenetrable," she was sentenced to 12 years hard labor. That was May 3, 1891.

Not only hard labor, hard luck. The man who might have got her off (we know his chivalry for women in distress) was busy that weekend. The next day, Monday, while Connie was being hooted on the narrow gauge to the train for Montpellier Prison, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Moriarty grappled at the Reichenbach Falls.

We know Holmes's special interest in Montpellier. He visited there during the famous absence 1891–94. He told Watson it was to do research in coal-tar derivatives, which led to oxides of uranium and you-know-what. Actually it was because he was curious about those two dogs in the night-time. But he had a disappointment. In January 1892 Connie was declared insane and removed to an asylum. Bataille leaves her there, and I know nothing further. *Except* —

Consider the wolf-hunter.

M. Thaunié, the young aristocrat, had good reason to be grateful to Saint Hubert, patron of the chase. He had several witnesses to prove that on the fatal date he was in the woods and valleys of *la Creuse*, hunting wolves. But that's not far away (say, 40 miles), and sportsmen are notoriously generous in attesting each other. Bataille speaks guardedly about M. Thaunié. Although fifteen years younger than the ambrosial cashier, Bataille found the hunting squire the lesser fellow. ("*Beaucoup moins bien*"). He had "an indecisive mustache" and was frightened on the stand. Had he advised Connie to take a revolver for their little trip? Well, not exactly; he had told her the roads weren't safe, and they would have to leave late at night to avoid comment. — When was this excursion to take place? That night? — Well, not precisely. The date hadn't been fixed; it was going to be a bit later.

Presumably there were wolves to be killed first. Was the notary one of them? Consider two possible points. There was mighty good shooting done on Lépine, which suggests an experienced marksman. Who but the wolf-hunter could do that accurate shooting? And of all people concerned, Thaunié was most familiar with dogs. Was that why they didn't bark? They knew him already? They were from his own hunting kennel at Château de Blanzat, and he had given them to her? Even perhaps a third point: several people testified to hearing wheels in the night. They were thought to be the wagons of the wine harvest. But everyone in Chantelle was thinking *vendange* just then. Might those wheels actually have been M. Thaunié's carriage?

If I had been M. Waldeck-Rousseau I would have explored M. Thaunié's alibi more deeply. Does it sound a little like *la Creuse* itself, hollow?

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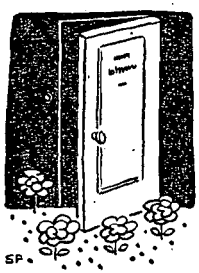

Your Editor once wrote a two-part article on the detective story which appeared in successive issues of "Good Housekeeping" Magazine — May 1944 and June 1944. The original title for the essay was "The Golden Twenty," but the titles actually used were "The 10 Most Important Books of Detective Short Stories" and "The 10 Most Important Detective Novels." The emphasis, as the titles indicate, was on books *— not on individual short stories.*

Now, suppose we go one step further: Which are the 10 most important detective short stories — or to put it another way, which are the 10 best detective short stories ever written?

That's a tall order to rattle off just like that — even with the background of half a lifetime's research in and study of the detective short story. Certain nominations are inevitable and unavoidable. There would have to be a Poe story about Dupin: most serious critics would choose either "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (mainly because it is not only an imperishable classic but it was the world's first detective story) or "The Purloined Letter" (because it is a more polished and subtle work of art than even the "Rue Morgue"). There would have to be a Sherlock Holmes short story; we would vote for "The Red-Headed League," but at least four other Holmes shorts would receive persistent nomination. There would have to be a Father Brown story, an Uncle Abner, a Dr. Thorndyke — these three would have varying favorites among the deeper students of the genre.

That makes five out of the ten — and we've barely scratched the surface of selection. Three more tales clamor for admittance into the charmed circle: Jacques Futrelle's "The Problem of Cell 13," about The Thinking Machine — acclaimed in many contests on record as the Number 1 Detective Short Story of all time; Anthony Berkeley's "The Avenging Chance," about Roger Sheringham — another deathless classic; and Lord Dunsany's "The Two Bottles of Relish," about detective Mr. Linley, whose single excursion into detection is an unassailable masterpiece.

That makes eight out of the ten — only two more to go and still an infinite variety of chef d'oeuvres, crême de la crême, *to pick from.*

For the ninth story in the golden ten we assign to you this Herculean labor: select one story — only one, mind you — from the best written by Arthur Morrison, M. P. Shiel, Baroness Orczy, Robert Barr, Maurice Leblanc, E. C. Bentley, Ernest Bramah, H. C. Bailey, Agatha Christie, the Coles, Dorothy L. Sayers, Anthony Wynne, Ronald A. Knox, Margery Allingham, Dashiell Hammett, T. S. Stribling, Ellery Queen, John Dick-

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son Carr, Mignon G. Eberhart, Mary Roberts Rinehart, E. W. Hornung, Frederick Irving Anderson, Edgar Wallace, Cornell Woolrich — and we could go on almost indefinitely.

Yes, out of that list select only one — because the 10th story of the golden ten has been written, signed, sealed, and delivered to posterity these past fifteen years. No golden ten would even be worth discussion without the inclusion of Thomas Burke's classic of classics — "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole."

After that roundabout rubric we now bring you another story by Thomas Burke — "Roses Round the Door," never previously published in the United States. This story is admittedly not in the same stratospheric class with "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole" — how many, as we have just analyzed, are? But it is one of the best stories Thomas Burke wrote shortly before his death and it will remind you of the great tale-spinning Mr. Burke wove into his never-to-be-forgotten LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS.

ROSES ROUND THE DOOR

by THOMAS BURKE

If you knew the old Chinatown in the Limehouse and Poplar of the past, you probably knew that little store of Ah Woo that used to stand at the corner of Korea Street, its window crammed with the spices and the scarlet packets and gay toys of China. A store where you met olive-faced men in lounge suits and bowler hats, whose eyes under the bowler hats held the silence of eastern temples and the glitter of green seas. And where you sometimes met Rosie Moone, the heart-smiter, who was far more of a flower than the Flower Maidens they find for any production of "Parsifal."

The older men gathered in the store to discuss with Ah Woo such matters as high politics and high commerce, with which they had no concern, and which their opinions could no more affect than the opinion of the trapped fly can affect the spider. The younger men gathered to look at Rosie. She drew both English and Chinese around her, and they would stand for an hour gazing upon her and bearing themselves towards her assertively or reverently, according to their knowledge or ignorance of how beautiful maidens like to be treated.

Among those who were often in the store was Cheng Kang. He seldom stayed to gossip. Mostly he came in to make a few quick purchases, as though he were buying remedies for somebody at the point of death, and shot out again before the company realised he had been there. But there

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were occasions when he looked at Rosie as though he would like to eat her — if he were not so occupied with other eatables. As this was the only attention he showed her, she did not regard him with much favour. Where she killed other young men with smiles, she tried to wound him with stings of the eyes and scorns of the shoulder. He did not seem to notice them.

He seemed to notice very little, and few people noticed him. His only regular associate was old Suey Lim, who lived in Foochoo Street. This perhaps was why few people gave him their countenance. The Limehouse of that time was always noted for its odours. You could in a few minutes catch the odour of bilge-water, of gas, of glue, of resin, of fried-fish, and all those Eastern odours that can almost be tasted on the lips. Some were not too disagreeable. Others were of a kind that required new words to convey their rankness. But if anybody, at that time, wanted a rough synonym for an unpleasant odour, he invariably brought in the name of Suey Lim.

Suey Lim had such a bad name in the district that, with the exception of young Cheng Kang, nobody associated with him but those who already had worse names. He and those about him seemed to have no real occupation, yet they were always making money. He had a finger in most of the pies of Chinatown, and did not disdain even to have fingers in its dumplings and biscuits. Nothing was too small for him, except his hat, and the only thing that was too large was his overbearing manner.

He treated Cheng Kang as a fool, and Cheng Kang went about with behaviour that almost justified the treatment. He was always sad; he appeared to be very stupid; and he certainly was so pessimistic that he could never see a silver lining without thinking of clouds. His manner was so little alert, and he seemed to be such an easy mark, that nobody found it interesting enough to cheat him or double-cross him. He lived in a cottage in Shanghai Street — one of four owned by Suey Lim — and it was understood that Suey Lim let him live rent-free.

What service he gave to warrant this astounding breach of landlord principles, nobody could discover, unless it was the service of publicity agent. Certainly he was always emphatic in his admiration of Suey Lim. Suey Lim was everything that he himself wasn't — forthright, bold, and successful — a fit subject of praise and reverence. He admired him so much that he was always talking in bars about his fine qualities, his generosity, his ability, his sharp wit, his foresight; and he was always so ready to drink his health that he often went home quite tight with admiration.

Suey Lim, on his side, spoke of Cheng Kang as the last of a long line of fools, and often said that his ancestors were no doubt still wandering about in the Middle Air because they hadn't sense enough to go in out of

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the rain. When they asked why he allowed the fool to hang around him, he said that silent laughter was good for the lungs, and as life provided so few occasions for it, except of an acid kind, which was bad for the lungs, he was grateful for the existence of Cheng Kang, who provided ten occasions every day.

There was a certain day when the fool provided a very special occasion — one that caused Suey Lim to draw in his breath in gusts of whispering laughter, and to ask as much of the world as he could reach to join him in it.

On that day, Suey Lim was poisoning the air by taking a walk through it, when he came to Shanghai Street, and came upon the spectacle of Cheng Kang decorating the doorway and the window-frame of his cottage with paper roses of many colours. He paused to watch and to sniff. Then, with a glance that commanded the attention of those around him to the young idiot, he spoke. He spoke in a loud voice, and in English — for the benefit of the bystanders. "Well, you wooden-headed son of a dough-headed parrot, and what are you supposed to be doing now?"

Cheng Kang politely explained that he was decorating his door and window with paper roses.

"That," said Suey Lim, "could be seen by anybody — even as big a fool as yourself. But I would like to know your purpose in making yourself and your house ridiculous — my house, I should say."

Cheng Kang explained in an equally loud voice that he had invited the beautiful young Rosie from Korea street to visit him, and take supper with him, that evening, and ——"

"What — *you?* Have you got the conceit to suppose that the most desired girl of this quarter, the very flower of the garden, would spend an evening with *you?*"

"Why not? Anyway, she said she would. And so I am making a visible and agreeable welcome to her."

"If that is so," said Suey Lim, "and she has really accepted your invitation, it would occur to anybody but a fool like yourself that it would be only decent to go to the small expense of providing real roses. It is hardly a compliment to a distinguished visitor to greet her with imitation roses."

"In one sense," said Cheng, from the top of a ladder, "you may be right. But at the moment my use of paper roses is intentional, and as Miss Rosie is a girl of brains she will perceive my point. Real roses fade and die. Imitation roses don't. Passion, like real roses, soon perishes. True love, like paper roses, lasts much longer. The three hundred paper roses which I have bought to dress my house inside and out, are not only gay and pleasing to a girl's eye. They are also symbolical of my lasting affection."

Suey Lim hissed with amusement, and the cockney bystanders giggled. "Amiable fool! All that you say with your similes of real roses and passion, and imitation roses and affection, is

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prettily put, and almost true. But only a fool would tell it to a girl. If you think any girl would prefer imitation roses and lasting affection, to real roses and a brief passion, you are an even bigger fool than I thought."

"You are talking," said Cheng, "of most girls. You don't know Rosie."

"Nor, it is evident, do you." And with that Suey-Lim went on with his walk, shaking with unheard laughter, and told all whom he met of the latest idiocy of Cheng Kang. The bystanders, watching the process of decoration, gradually thinned until only a little girl with a snub nose was left. After much concentrated watching she delivered her opinion on the matter.

"He's right, you know. It's just silly. Paper roses are only for Christmas. They're not things to give to your sweetheart. They might be all right for kids, but any grown-up girl would feel insulted — *I* can tell you that."

"Nevertheless," said Cheng, "I shall go on with the work. You see, it's an old Eastern custom — putting paper roses round your doors and windows and rooms when you entertain your friends."

The snub nose became more snub. "Is it? I never heard of it."

"No doubt, little one, there are many Eastern customs you haven't heard of. Some, I hope, you never will hear of. At least, not until you're much older."

One could not wonder — at any rate, nobody did wonder — that Cheng should have been smitten by Rosie, since Rosie was a rare item in the London scene. One can go about London all day for a week, and seldom see a living creature. Millions of animated phantoms pass along, but only when one of the Rosies flashes by does one realise the meaning of being alive. Rosie was unmistakably alive. She was alive in eyes, fingers, brow, shoulders and shoes, and in the electric frisk of her frock and her hair. Even when standing still she seemed to be dancing, and in movement she was a stream of golden rain. No wonder, then, that when she answered his humble and reverent invitation, by saying, What Next? and then adding — well, perhaps she might: she'd see how she felt: it might be a bit of fun; no wonder he seemed to be knocked off the perch of life on which he had so precarious a footing. No wonder that he was apparently so bemused and distracted by those casual words that he went and bought three hundred paper roses to garnish his dwelling for her delight.

But Suey Lim was right. Cheng did not know his Rosie, or any other girl. And when the story, spread by Suey-Lim, came to her that afternoon, she said "What!" in such a tone that if Cheng had heard it, even his slow mind might have gathered that all was not well. Decorating the front of his house, in *her* honour, with *paper* roses! What next — insulting little wretch! What kind of a girl did he take her for? Those foreigners might

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treat their own women as off-hand as they pleased, but he'd have to be taught that English girls aren't to be treated that cheap way. Buying a girl *paper* roses — when dozens of fellows were ready to give her real roses any day. Nice sort of supper she'd get if his idea of a welcome was to fill the house with paper roses — cardboard pies, probably, and wooden chickens, like a pantomime supper. Go to supper with that little fool? — like fun she would! . . . And a lot more things she said, and worse.

But Cheng was happy in knowing nothing of this, and he went about his preparations with idiotic care, and made such a mess of his cottage that no self-respecting char-woman would have gone near it. When he had, as he hoped, made a perfect setting for the jewel that was Rosie, he took his koto and filled the room and the street with love-music.

The air he played was not a happy air. Love, for him (as he explained to a local lout who asked where the polecats were fighting) touched something higher than happiness. He thought of love as a comedy of stings and delights, stings that were sweet, and delights that were tinct with discontent. So his music went into the blue night, carrying in it the dolorous pace of the river, and the aching breath of the exile for the loss of something that was never possessed. It carried a piercing whisper of sorrow and the futility of sorrow. It sighed of spring-time, and it rippled about despair, and it set the darkness tingling with notes that troubled the ear like the sobbing of a child.

But it didn't trouble Rosie's ear. Like everybody else, she heard it, and like everybody else made blasphemous remarks about it — only stronger than theirs. She was sitting in a café with the favoured boy of the moment, who had money and could hardly, under Rosie's eyes, get it out of his pocket fast enough. If some playboys of the West End are plungers, this boy was a high diver. Rosie was glad she had heard about those paper roses. She was having a good time.

Cheng, at the door of his cottage, went on playing. He explained, to hostile interviewers, that he was listening and waiting for a particular step. Through something like three hours he heard the clitter of many a girl's heels on the stone paving approaching Shanghai Street, but none of them had the vital ring of Rosie's rapid heels. He could, he said, detect hers at fifty yards. But he never did detect them, and as he sat or stood, waiting and waiting, his disappointment made his music light and lissome. Those in near-by streets who had heard his earlier music had assumed that his heart was breaking. They now assumed that his rich uncle had left him everything.

It was past midnight before he realised that Rosie was faithless. As the towers were tolling their message of the end of another and not too-perfect day, he went to the door to give a final look-out for her. The little

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girl with the snub nose was passing, and he called a question: Had she seen anything of Miss Rosie? She had. She told him cheerfully where Rosie was and what she was doing. He said he had been waiting some hours for her. She said she knew that, and drew the snub nose up to its full height, made a hideous face (which wasn't difficult) and said "What 'opes!" and "What did I tell you?" He ought to have heard the things that Rosie had said about him — that is, if he liked hearing a bit of truth. He asked — what things? She told him one or two of the more repeatable things about himself and his paper roses, and went on her way whistling.

He received her report with Oriental calm. But then, as though he were frantic with self-disgust, he began to tear down the roses round the window and the door, and to tear down the rest of the three hundred strung about the ground-floor room. Then he seemed to realise that if he merely tore them down they would still be lying around for himself and others to see. An ardent lover, in such circumstances, would naturally want to be rid of them; to blot from his sight that evidence of misery and folly. Stamping them into the gutter would be no good, nor piling them into the ash-can. But there is a certain way of obliterating paper; so, at a quarter past midnight, careless of everything, he set about the job.

At eighteen minutes past midnight the dark hush of Limehouse was riddled in three separate places by a fusillade of yellow bells. Those who were about the streets or in the cafés told each other, with authority, that there must be a Fire. In the café where Rosie was sitting, she and the rest of the company got up and went to the door, and reached it just as a young man went running past with news.

"Chinatown's on fire! Shanghai Street's all lit up. The whole dam' street's lit up!"

And it was. In two seconds the café was empty, and the company raced down East India Dock Road to the brightest fire they had seen for some time. Cheng Kang's attempt at destroying the paper roses that so bitterly mocked his wounded heart, had caught his own cottage, and a light wind had carried the flames from there to the three adjoining cottages. Two of these were empty, and from the third the people were able to get themselves and most of their goods away before the flames reached it.

Engines were streaking down the main road, but they had little chance of doing any work. The elementary History primers used in our elementary schools make such a splash of the Great Fire of London that the elementary minds of builders and surveyors seem to have assumed that that one fire exhausted London's efforts in that way. So, when they laid out the streets and byways, they did so in the bland assurance that there never could be another, and there was therefore no need to make them wide enough to admit a fire-engine.

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No engine could get into Shanghai Street. Engines ramped and jingled at the end of the street, and a hose was run down the whole length of it. There was no room for two hoses. By the time the one hose could get to work, the crowd was enjoying the spectacle of four cottages transformed into pillars and wreaths of flame that changed colour with every puff of wind and every fresh bit of material it consumed. Those dull, decrepit cottages went out in crimson, orange, yellow, purple, and white. The fool of Chinatown had provided many a laugh in his time, but his idiocy had never provided so good an entertainment as this; and when the roofs and walls finally folded up and fell, and what had been a first-class fire resolved itself into a black and wet and reeking morass, the crowd went home in a state of thrill and laughter.

Next morning those who hadn't seen it went to look at the ruins. All the young girls, who knew the story, continued to laugh, but one or two older women — old enough to be as youthfully sentimental as youth never is — pitied him. It was natural, after the way he had been treated, that he should want to get rid of the things that had caused Rosie to turn him down, and it was a shame that on top of her treatment, he should have brought this second calamity on himself. They hoped something would be done for him. Perhaps somebody would get up a subscription. If so, that Rosie ought to head the list, and stump up handsome. They sought him out, and while the young girls made a grinning half-circle about him, the older women condoled with him, and told him to bear up.

He took the calamity with his usual gravity, and when they said that something would probably be done for him, he said it was very kind of them.

Something *was* done for him. A week later he was sitting with Suey Lim. Suey Lim, who was in the middle of one of his bouts of teetotalism, was sententious. He always was when sober. "Well, well," he was saying, "the gods do as they will with us, and it is all for the best. We are bothered by business — chastised with paper roses — and purified by fire. Here," he said, handing over ten pounds, "is your share. You managed the affair very well. The insurance people paid on all four cottages without a word. Very soon we shall have another job for you — over at Woolwich. But I shall have to think of something new. We can't use paper roses twice."

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One of the rules of detective-story technique that most writers agree on is: no coincidence. The long arm of coincidence is taboo — that is, in *a detective story. But no one has ever passed a law against coincidence* outside *a detective story.*

For example: here is a strange coincidence involving all the Squeakie stories written to date. The first one appeared in EQMM, issue of May 1943. Note the month — May. The second in the series, with your Editor playing no conscious part in the growing coincidence, appeared in the May 1945 issue of EQMM. Again, May. And now the third of the series, in a perfectly natural course of events, becomes part of the current issue — May 1946. (Does that mean we can expect the fourth Squeakie story to be ready for publication in our May issue of next year, 1947? We shall see.)

But there is still more to this strange coincidence. Here is the third Squeakie story, the third one to appear in a May issue of EQMM, and what is the story's title? "Matter for a May Morning" — May again! As Lord Byron said: "A 'strange coincidence,' to use a phrase by which such things [as blurbs] are settled nowadays."

MATTER FOR A MAY MORNING

by MARGARET MANNERS

HAVING been on the receiving end of Squeakie's telegrams before, I never should have gone to Mitford if the wire had read "serious situation," as Squeakie insists it did. "Aunt Agatha in serious *condition*," sounded as if Agatha were dying! I went sadly up to Mitford in the middle of the nastiest wet weather we'd had in many a spring.

At the Bolton station I was greeted by Squeakie and, much to my surprise, her dripping wet but robust aunt! With Agatha beaming at me I couldn't very well express disappointment because she wasn't at home sick in bed.

Silently I climbed into the battered car that Agatha likes to think she drives, glared at Squeakie, and tried in vain to convey to them that I felt duped, damp and damned annoyed.

Agatha Lawrence is Squeakie's father's sister. She teaches English, principally Shakespeare, at Mitford — a small, exceedingly expensive and correspondingly select college for women. Both she and Squeakie derive their love of the bard from Spencer Lawrence, who carried his adoration to the point of christening his daughter (Squeakie) Desdemona. A fact I have been trying to overlook ever since I married her.

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It was the eighth day of a steady downpour and the waters of the Bolton River and Mitford Fork were, as the poets put it, "wild." It was anything but the traditional May morning of commencement convention. Squeakie had come up to Mitford a week before to watch Agatha direct the college production of *As You Like It*. They were especially worked up about a young Shakespeare student, Beatrice Coburn, who was playing Rosalind. Agatha boasted that she was the only person she'd heard in years who could read Shakespeare properly! I had managed to get out of the dubious pleasure, until the arrival of the telegram, by pleading pressure of work on the paper.

"Well," I said ungraciously, "what's the matter with you two?"

Agatha took her eyes off the road for a second and the women exchanged a look that gave me an uneasy feeling that there was collusion somewhere.

"Matter?" Squeakie asked innocently. Then her eyes bulged and she added, "Matter? . . . Matter? . . . Of course! Matter for a May morning! *Twelfth Night!* That's *very* appropriate. Don't you think so, Agatha?"

"Not very," Agatha said dryly. "May is usually connected with sunshine and happiness, not with rain and mu . . ." She stopped.

Naturally I thought she was going to say mud, and I imagined that some crisis in her driving had forced her to amputate the word. I didn't even begin to suspect the truth. "There was some talk," I said politely, "of a problem. Remember?"

"The problem," Squeakie said, "is Beatrice Coburn."

"Ah!" I felt I was getting somewhere. "The star of *As You Like It*?"

"Star? Aunt Agatha wouldn't use the *star* system, David!" Squeakie was really shocked. "*Every* part in Shakespeare is a star part! Why some of the best . . ."

"How was the performance?" I asked hastily.

"There hasn't been a performance, darling." Her tone implied that it was unspeakably dense of me not to have known it. "That's what we've been trying to tell you! (It wasn't.) It was to be given in the outdoor amphitheater, but with all this rain . . . !"

"Yes," Agatha added between set teeth as she grappled with the wheel. "We'll have to give it in the auditorium. Can you imagine green drapes for the forest of Arden when we might have had real trees?"

"There's something phoney about this!" I said wearily. "Anybody can paint a sign saying, ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST. You don't need me for that!"

"It's a question," Squeakie went on, completing some unspoken train of thought. "It's a question of how a talented and charming girl can suddenly become warped and twisted. We can't find out, and we're worried."

"If that's all," I said, making a brave effort to extricate myself, "I can fix that for you, and get back to

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work. Beatrice has become a brat because you two have spoiled her by making such an unholy fuss about her acting. But if you think I'm going to take on the job of sweetening her disposition . . . !"

"Oh, no!" Squeakie hastened to relieve my mind. "Not Beatrice! We just thought you might be useful with the Bolton Chief of Police!"

"Damn!" I said. "Why should I be useful with the Chief of Police?"

"*Please!* Keep still!" Agatha groaned.

She was right! The road was badly washed and she, certainly, could afford no distractions. I had *two* things to worry me, Agatha's driving and the Bolton Chief of Police.

As we approached the college the waters grew more turbulent. Agatha had to swing the car away from the east gate or "Moat" at the last possible second because the bridge itself had just decided to give way and was being washed down the ornamental waters of Mitford!

"Shades of Matilda Mitford!" Agatha said cheerfully. "There's only the West Moat left now. But *that* has never failed in the history of the college!"

"Had this one?" I asked with interest.

"Why, no," Agatha said, "I don't suppose it had!" Which left me rather puzzled as to how to account for her cheer.

On the opposite bank, rising out of the silver curtain of the rain, I saw the gray outlines of the late Gothic towers of Mitford College.

When the sun shines Mitford has what is known as charm. Ivy mantels the walls and hides the strictly home-grown origin of the stonework. Unfortunately, Matilda Mitford, the college benefactress, had journeyed through Europe in search of culture at its fount. She came back with a passion for Gothic at its worst. Because of her romantic notions the Mitford Fork had been channeled from the Bolton River to supply a wide and picturesque canal that isolated the campus and all its buildings. In short, Mitford was an island domain of learning. The two bridges, inaccurately called moats, with their bastioned lodge gates were the only means of ingress and egress. It was all very much like a Hollywood set for Robin Hood. If that last bridge went, I reflected, a siege within the confines of Mitford would be a dismal affair.

As if to underline my fears the West Moat was a mass of swirling water when we reached it. Agatha's car snorted, shook all over like a terrier, and took to the waves.

"Wouldn't it be wiser," I said stupidly, "if Agatha's house were off the island? If that last bridge goes . . ."

"If that happens," Squeakie said comfortingly, "it will be *much* better to be on the island. We'll be on hand for any developments."

It sounded so much like one of her usual *non sequiturs* that I didn't bother about it. If I had realized that she was referring to murder I should have

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turned then and there and waded back the way I had come. When I looked again, Agatha was bringing the car to a gasping stop in front of a tall forbidding mass of gray stone.

"You won't mind, David?" she asked, glancing at her watch. "I promised to stop in for a minute at this rehearsal. Things haven't been going too well. I especially want to get in for the 'mock marriage' scene."

We stumbled through a badly lighted hallway into an even darker auditorium. There was one glaring electric bulb on a stand in the center of the stage. Two young women were gayly shouting at each other over this pool of light.

"Hist!" Agatha said in my ear. "They're just starting! Beatrice has finished, 'Farewell, monsieur traveller', and is beginning to tease Orlando. Listen!"

The words came over to us crystal clear, and for a minute I forgot the rain outside, and the bare, badly lighted stage. The bright beauty of Rosalind and the magic of the forest of Arden spoke to us through the voice of Beatrice Coburn. "Break an hour's promise in love! He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of a thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love . . ."

I began to relax and enjoy it. The lines flowed on alive, and full of the laughing wit of the part. And then Rosalind pouted the words, "I had as lief be woo'd of a snail."

Suddenly, as if by reverse magic, all that was Rosalind drained out of the girl on the stage, and she became just a kid in sweater and skirt and saddle oxfords. I wondered how I could have thought her good. She hesitated, stumbled, and before she reached the end of her speech, stopped dead and stood there pale and silent in the middle of the stage. Agatha and Squeakie looked at each other in horror.

"It's no good!" I heard Agatha whisper. "She can't get past that line. I suppose it's too much to expect her to carry on under the circumstances."

Squeakie mumbled something about trauma and emotional blockage.

Agatha sighed and called to her young protégée. "That was fine, Beatrice. Now skip a few lines and go on. Take it from, 'Come woo me, woo me!' "

There was a rustle of whispers at the back of the stage. Beatrice leaned forward and peered toward us over the curved apron of the stage. "It's no use, Miss Lawrence. I don't know what's the matter with me. I can't do it. You'll have to let me stop!" The voice wasn't tearful, just very tired, without any life or will.

"Very well, dear. It's time for lunch anyway."

Without a word or look the girl left her companions and crossed the stage. A man who had been sitting in the darkened auditorium got up and helped her down the steps into the aisle. They came silently toward us. I saw that they intended to pass us without speaking, but Agatha im-

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pulsively caught the girl's hand.

"My dear," she said, "don't worry. You *are* wonderful. It's just all this. . . . If you don't want to go on with it, you mustn't even try."

The stout, gray-haired man turned sad reproachful eyes on her. "Thanks, Miss Lawrence," he said rather sharply. "I think she'll make it, all right. Come along Beatrice!" He took the pale girl by the hand and led her out of the building.

"Who's he?" I said, unaccountably irritated. "He acts like her jailer!"

Agatha jumped nervously as if I'd said the wrong thing. "Yes, David, a very loving jailer — her father. If something isn't done I'm afraid she'll have a much harsher one soon. Come up to the cottage for a bite of lunch and I'll tell you about it."

But before I sat down to Agatha's groaning board there was something I had to get straight. "This Police Chief I'm to charm," I said. "What about *him*?"

"Now, now, David," Agatha has her own strange way of being reassuring. "It's just that Prescott Harding happens to be Police Chief of Bolton, and he dislikes women. Squeakie can't get anything out of him. It's discouraging. He wouldn't even let her see the weapon!"

"Wouldn't he?" I said slyly. "Personally I can see his point. Why *should* Squeakie see a weapon?"

"He's a misogynist!" Squeakie said as if she didn't think that possible. And then, "I thought it might prove something about Beatrice. But it wouldn't necessarily. It was a hammer, you know."

"Oh Heavens! You've gone and gotten into another murder, Squeakie!"

"Don't shout, David. If Beatrice *did* kill that boy, which I don't admit. It's not nearly so strange as why she changed overnight into a problem child."

"Would it be too much to ask you to start from the beginning," I asked.

"Heavens, dear! The beginning is what I'm looking for!"

"Is that right?" By this time I was in the position of the bird hypnotized by the snake, or the hen by the chalk line.

"If you have the beginning, darling," she explained, "you only have to keep going and you're bound to reach the end."

I tried to speak but nothing came out.

On the way to Agatha's we walked into blinding sheets of slanting rain. I was just turning a corner when a hurtling projectile hit me head on. Gasping for breath I made out the face of a flustered young freshman who began stammering shrill but earnest apologies.

"That's quite all right, Virginia," Agatha said. "Where are you going?"

The wild young creature immediately dropped her voice to a conspiratorial mutter, "I'm going for Beatrice's lunch tray. Janice said she'd meet me but . . . ooof!"

Another young creature had come flying around the corner bumping Virginia speechless. The new arrival

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was a pale quiet girl with dark hair drawn back severely from a high forehead and held by a circular comb. She wasn't pretty, but she had what might be called distinction.

"Janice!" Agatha's voice was sharp. "You two were allowed to help with Beatrice's trays not only because you knew everything already, but to keep others from knowing, to spare Beatrice embarrassment. If you're going to go careening all over the campus with such an obvious air of secrecy . . ."

"We're sorry, Miss Lawrence," the girl Janice said softly. "We understand. Come on, Virginia, you can take the tray over and I'll call for it later."

"Of course, it doesn't matter," Agatha said as we went on, "a good many people know or have guessed the truth. If Prescott Harding wants to arrest her . . ."

"The Police Chief that I was brought here to handle?" I asked.

"Be sure," Squeakie warned me, "that you tell him that you're from the *Herald*. They're always nice to a newspaper man."

We went in to a delicious lunch in Agatha's cottage, but by this time I was so worried I simply couldn't eat.

I was told that Beatrice Coburn was passing through an emotionally stormy period of her life, and at present was kept locked up by her father in the guest house on the campus in which he was staying. He escorted her to rehearsals and back again, which caused a good deal of comment among her fellow Thespians.

"He began it to keep the college from expelling her," Agatha explained, "and to keep her from eloping. I suspect he's continuing the measure in a vain hope that it will stay Prescott Harding's official hand."

I gathered that Beatrice Coburn's parents had recently been divorced. Her father, a rich shoe manufacturer, was going to marry his secretary, Veronica Blake. All the participants in this domestic drama were unusually understanding and reasonable. Veronica was a paragon of charm and efficiency, who alone in the world had managed to raise her younger sister, Janice, the girl we had met a few minutes before. There had been an agreement between the parents that Beatrice would be better off with her father and his new wife after the marriage.

Beatrice, as was not unnatural, violently opposed such a solution and was openly hostile to her father's secretary-fiancée. Miss Blake had wisely suggested sending Beatrice to Mitford where her sister Janice was so happy. Both father and daughter accepted the suggestion with relief.

"The first peculiar thing was the beer," Agatha said. "The Dean discovered that Beatrice was drinking beer every night in her room. Beatrice explained that she was drinking one bottle every night before going to bed in the hope that it would help her to sleep. She had read that it would act as a soporific. The college physician found that she was in a highly

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nervous state, but thought it might be due to the approaching performance. He suggested that Beatrice try warm milk and aspirin. After a purely formal protest, Beatrice gave up her beer drinking."

I ventured to interrupt at this point to say that Beatrice was quite right about beer.

"David! You forget the girl is barely seventeen. Beer is hardly . . . And then she was so difficult, so secretive!"

"Yes, why beer?" Squeakie said. "Why not a warm bath or counting sheep or milk?"

"Why any of the things?" Agatha asked. "Look at her behavior at rehearsals!" She turned to me. "You know Shakespeare. Of course, I excise the coarser lines. But some of the references are not too specific so we just play them fast without any attempt to point the meaning. References to horns for example. You saw what happened today. When she gets to the line, 'Why horns which such as you are fain to be beholden to your wives for,' she can't say it. It is, of course, a bawdy reference to the horns of cuckoldry, the sign of the deceived husband."

I began to be interested in this seventeen-year-old, who drank beer, and hadn't a husband but was upset by references to cuckoldry.

"Another thing," Agatha said, "the child's nature has changed completely. Her mother came to see her and Beatrice refused to see her at all. I suppose the poor child resented being handed over to a stepmother. Then her father and Miss Blake came up for the performance. Naturally they were very thoughtful and arranged it so that Veronica Blake came to see her sister. They did not come together.

"Much to my surprise, Beatrice presented herself to her father and asked his forgiveness for having been rude to Miss Blake. She said she would be willing to live with them whenever they wished it.

"Almost immediately after that, Beatrice gave Mitford the makings of a dreadful scandal. If her father hadn't been here to take charge she would have been expelled immediately. As it is he has promised that she will not return next term.

"Beatrice spent the night out, in the woods somewhere, with a young man of the town, Edward Haven! There was a complicated and unsatisfactory story. The car had broken down — they had fallen asleep outdoors.

"The whole thing was exceedingly nasty and very hard to keep quiet. Beatrice has received so much publicity as a budding talent. Her father was furious with her. However, he prevented her expulsion, and when she threatened to elope he locked her up in the guest house where he was staying. The things he said he would do to the young man were simply fearful.

"The whole thing was astounding! Beatrice, as far as I could see, was not at all — how shall I express myself? —

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precocious as regards young men. Edward Haven was just somebody most of the girls competed for in the spirit of fun. He is underfoot a good deal because he is an excellent stage carpenter and is building some sectional units for the play.

"One night after her dinner tray had been removed Beatrice climbed out of her window, down a rope of sheets, and went to meet him. Virginia Wheatley saw her go and being of a romantic turn of mind did not report it. Shortly after, quite honestly, Beatrice came back wet with rain, shoes covered with mud, and asked to be admitted to her locked room.

"A few hours later the body of Edward Haven was discovered lying beside his car in Harper's Lane, a lonely spot near the far side of the college arboretum. His head had been battered in with a hammer which he carried with the rest of his tools in a box on the back seat of his car. The mud on Beatrice's shoes was from the Harper's Lane vicinity. She offered no explanation and made no move to defend herself.

"Unfortunately there is gossip on the campus to the effect that the young man had come to his senses and no longer wished to marry Beatrice. Chief Harding believes she killed him in a fit of fury when he refused to elope with her. The state of the young man's head was . . . well, like most of her campus contemporaries Beatrice had a smashing forehand at tennis!"

I shuddered at the thought of that vicious adolescent maenad steadily beating out her sweetheart's brains as if she were serving tennis balls! "I don't think I want to meet your young horror," I said.

"All *you* have to do," Squeakie said pointedly, "is to meet Police Chief Harding. That man! When I told him how I'd helped Gregory in New York on his cases, he asked me if I didn't think woman's place was in the home!"

"Gosh!" I said considerably cheered. There's a guy I *would* like to meet!"

At that moment we were interrupted by a low ominous rumbling that grew steadily to a thundering roar. Agatha and I rushed to the window just as the world seemed to splinter and crack away.

Squeakie who hadn't left her seat reached for the teapot and poured herself a cup of tea. "There goes the other bridge," she said with grim satisfaction. "Now if only that Police Chief isn't on the island . . . I may not need your services after all, David."

"Darling, never mind where *he* is — look where *we* are! Do they have rowboats at this college?"

"Don't be silly! Don't you see? If I'm here and he's there, he'll *have* to be nice. My information for his. A lot is going to happen on this island!"

"Dear me," Agatha smiled, "is that quite legal, darling?" She went off to answer the telephone and I stood scowling at my wife.

Agatha came back pale and shaken.

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"It's Beatrice," she said unsteadily. "She's dying, I think. She seems to have taken something!"

"The doctor . . ." I said.

Agatha stopped me with a look. "The bridge is down. The highway is flooded and the doctor isn't on the island."

Squeakie was already putting on her raincoat. "There's a nurse," she said. "Let's go."

A few minutes later we arrived wet and breathless at the door of Beatrice's room in the guest house. We opened the door on a fantastic scene. Dean Howells and Miss Andrews, the nurse were standing white and shocked while a fair, sweet-faced woman was bending over the unconscious Beatrice sobbing and crying a torrent of remorseful exclamations.

"Oh, my dear, why did you? Your poor dear father! If I had only known. . . . Oh, you wicked girl. . . . No, no, Beatrice, I didn't mean that! Oh, how could you?"

It was Agatha who stopped her. "*Miss Blake!* Get out! If Beatrice were to open her eyes now, do you think it would be you she would want to see?"

"Oh!" The woman stopped, bewildered, helpless. "I'm sorry, sorry . . . of course. I'll go downstairs. Her father must be told. If you need me . . ." She stumbled out.

"Well!" the Dean said. "For an efficient secretary . . . !"

Agatha's lips set in a tight unforgiving line. "She's too soft and too sweet. All things to all people. I dislike her. Why does she have to be so disgustingly anxious to show how much she feels?"

The nurse cut us short. "If I only knew what she took! I just came from the infirmary. All the poisons are locked up. Nothing is missing."

"Her insomnia." I suggested. "Sleeping tablets?"

Miss Andrews shook her head. "Not without a prescription. We didn't give her one."

"How did she get it?" Agatha asked. "Did you find a container?"

"There's nothing," the Dean said. "We looked."

"I gave her an emetic," the nurse added. "The symptoms seem to call for warmth and stimulants, but these things are difficult if one isn't sure. . . ."

"The tray!" Squeakie said suddenly. "Send for those girls."

Virginia Wheatley and Janice Blake arrived so quickly that I suspected they had been waiting below for just such an opportunity. The tray, it seemed, had been taken back to the pantry. The dishes had been washed and put away. They had both gone to the kitchen for it. Virginia had taken it from there to the guest house by an underground pass. She was too upset to remember what was on it.

"There was a pot of tea," Janice said, quietly scornful of her friend's excitement, "some cheese macaroni, salad, sliced ham, and fruit for dessert, I think. I could tell from the dishes. I called for the empty tray."

I was uncomfortably aware that

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despite Miss Andrews' efforts the girl on the bed was breathing with more difficulty each moment.

"We want to find out what Beatrice could have taken," Squeakie said firmly. "It might save her life!"

Both girls looked blank and frightened.

"There should be lots of things around a college," I said in desperation. "Mitford has a fine arboretum and botanical garden. Perhaps they spray the plants with something."

Virginia's mouth fell open. "Janice! Don't you remember? Our botany class?"

Janice didn't remember.

"The day we talked about poisonous plants! Bea asked Professor Furness about belladonna — if the stuff actresses put in their eyes to make them large came from the plant! It got Furness started on poisonous plants in our garden. He told us where they grew and what they looked like. Beatrice must have remembered and . . ." Virginia suddenly choked and began to cry.

Miss Andrews came to life. "Get Professor Furness here, Virginia. I'm going to get Dr. Maidston on the telephone."

Janice Blake was already dialling the doctor's number on the telephone in the anteroom which had been part of Beatrice's confinement area. She brought the telephone through the doorway and handed it to Miss Andrews. "If you need me," she said, "I'll be downstairs with Mr. Coburn. He is going to be practically crazy, and Veronica is a mess!"

"Good girl," Miss Andrews approved. She made her report to the Doctor. There was an uncomfortable wait. "No!" she said. She looked at us with puzzled eyes. "There's something wrong," she whispered. "The symptoms aren't right for belladonna!"

And then Professor Furness came in carrying a large red volume entitled "Poisonous Plants of the Americas." He took one look at Beatrice. "No, not belladonna," he said. "Heavens, no! Wrong symptoms. Too pale. Should be flushed. Skin too clammy. Breathing shallow. Something else . . ." He flung a beseeching glance at the volume he carried.

"You can't work through all the plants in America by elimination," Squeakie said unkindly. "What else did you tell them about? Think, man!"

Miss Andrews who had been giving a fevered account of all this to the physician via the telephone spoke suddenly. "Dr. Maidston wonders . . . aconite?"

"Yes!" Professor Furness was almost rapturous. "I did mention it. Symptoms accurate. Monkshood, you know — exquisite flower, not in bloom yet. Doesn't matter, you use the roots. Sometimes called wolfsbane. Deadly, deadly. . . ."

But now Miss Andrews was taking the doctor's orders. Virginia and Professor Furness were dispatched to the infirmary. Beatrice was to be given an injection of strychnine. If she

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didn't respond there were other stimulants that must be tried. Would we stand by?

In one of the lulls in activity Squeakie buttonholed Virginia. "Did you see Beatrice when you took up the tray, Virginia?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Meadow! Her father always carries it in and brings it out to us."

She whisked away again, and Squeakie sighed and wandered into the small room off the bedroom. Miss Andrews was using it as an emergency infirmary. The stock bottle of strychnine was still there on the table; an empty hypodermic lay beside it. Miss Andrews, crisp and rustling, informed us that she was preparing a caffeine injection, just in case, but she didn't think it would be necessary.

"The pulse is much stronger," she added, beaming. "Trouble with breathing over. Thank you both so much!"

Squeakie nodded absently and nudged me out of the room. "There's a phone booth downstairs in the hall," she said. "Come on! I'm going to call Police Chief Harding."

Squeakie tiptoed passed the booth and, I am ashamed to say, stood for a moment listening outside the closed doors of the sitting room where Janice, Veronica and Mr. Coburn were keeping vigil. "I shouldn't like them to overhear," she whispered. "If they come out, let me know."

"Now that she's tried to kill herself," I protested, "you can't possibly prove that she didn't kill Haven!"

"Oh, David! It *isn't* suicide. It's murder — at least, attempted murder," she amended.

"How do you know?"

"The beer!" she said earnestly, and began speaking to Chief Harding in the even tones of a modern educator dealing with a stubborn child; but I noticed that she didn't overlook the old-fashioned methods of threat and bribery.

"After all, you can't get here even in a boat until the storm lets up. Why not be sensible? My husband is on the *Herald*, you know. It would be a featured story, I imagine." She waited a second for this delicate hint to sink in, smiling sweetly into the mouthpiece. It struck me that this was one of Squeakie's great moments — both police and doctors off the island and Squeakie running the whole shebang!

"It is not suicide!" I heard her say. "Absolutely not! Proof? Well, the girl isn't dead yet, for one thing. Don't be silly, you won't need any proof if the girl recovers and tells you she didn't take anything, will you? Now, tell me about those footprints around Haven's car."

She listened quietly. "The mud is the same? And you have the shoes that Beatrice wore that night? Thank *you*, Chief Harding. Goodbye!"

She raised horrified eyes to mine. "Footprints, David — coming and going *twice*. All of them Beatrice's. He thinks she wasn't sure the first time, and went back *to finish him off!*"

"Maybe it would be better if they didn't save her life," I said.

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"David! Never jump to conclusions on circumstantial evidence only," Squeakie admonished me. "You wait, she'll tell us she didn't take the poison herself! And she didn't kill Edward Haven, either!"

"The basis for *your* conclusion-jumping seems to be intuition alone," I said. "If she didn't kill him, why didn't she say so?"

"Because," Squeakie gave an impatient nod in the direction of the sitting-room door, "she thinks her father did it. He made enough threats."

"What about the beer?" I asked. "How can that help you to know it wasn't suicide?"

"The beer proves malice aforethought . . . Ssssh! Somebody's coming!"

But it was only Virginia Wheatley coming down the stairs with a grin that threatened to meet at the back of her head. She opened the sitting-room door and addressed the Blakes, Mr. Coburn, and us, with impartial benevolence. "Miss Andrews says she's rallying! Isn't it wonderful? You can go up and see her for just a minute, Mr. Coburn. Then she has to rest."

Janice Blake rose and took the stunned father by the hand. Waving her sister back she led him to the stairs. "I'll take him up," she said. "I'm not so sure he understands. He feels he drove her to it. Perhaps if he could speak to her . . ."

Virginia shook her head. "I don't think so," she said. "She just lies there and doesn't say *anything*."

Virginia wanted to follow them but Squeakie held her back. "Tell me," she said. "How did Beatrice get the idea of taking a glass of beer every night?"

Virginia looked guilty. "I guess I told her about it. She was nervous and couldn't sleep, so I told her."

Whatever Squeakie had been expecting it wasn't this. She looked astounded. "But, David," she said frantically, "Beatrice *couldn't* have killed him. A girl like that! Shakespeare is such good moral training."

"Yes," I said, "full of murderers and villains!"

"But they are always punished, David! Virginia, how did *you* know about the beer?"

Virginia flushed to the roots of her hair. "It was in a book I was reading," she said awkwardly. "Naturally the minute I read it I thought about Beatrice. Janice didn't think too much of the idea, because of its coming out of a novel."

"What novel?"

"Oh, just a book from the library." Virginia was really distressed. "A pretty tough one! You know, by Henry G. Lane. Janice took it out, and didn't have time to read it so she passed it on to me. When I showed her the pencil marks, she laughed . . ."

"What pencil marks?" Squeakie was very nearly rigid with irritation.

"Somebody who'd read it before had pencilled comments in the margin. They all do it here. Gosh, I found a book once with . . . Anyway, it said in lightly printed letters,

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'*cure for insomnia, must try it.*' Did I do something wrong, Mrs. Meadow?"

"Where is the book now?"

"I returned it to the library."

"Let's go — I want to see it!"

When we got to the library and found the book, Virginia blushed once more and started rapidly turning the pages. I couldn't say I blamed her. I'd read the book once myself.

"Darling," I said to my wife over the frantic young head of Mitford's erring freshman. "Tell me what this is about. Why the beer?"

"Because beer is *bitter*, darling."

"Damn it! I know beer is bitter . . ."

"Mrs. Meadow!" Virginia stood open-mouthed offering us the book. "It's here — about the beer in the story — but the writing in the margin . . . It's gone! Erased!"

"Lightly written, swiftly erased," Squeakie muttered, "by a fine Italian hand! And soon there'll have to be another erasure. . . . What about Beatrice's old room in the dormitory, Virginia?"

"It's still her room," Virginia said. "Most of Bea's things haven't been moved to the guest house."

"Well, let's try that," Squeakie said with the air of one driven to an end she didn't particularly like.

I was so weak and hungry by this time that nothing made any difference. I ploughed through rain and mud after Squeakie across the campus. A worried Agatha met us, and joined the silent pilgrimage. The four of us trailed over to one of the least attractive of the dark stone buildings. Squeakie didn't stay long. One swift glance into Beatrice Coburn's clothes closet seemed to satisfy her. She stooped swiftly and deposited a worn pair of mud-caked saddle oxfords in my arms.

"Exhibit A!" she said. "You can get one in each pocket of your raincoat if you try, David."

As we left the dormitory a lowered umbrella came up the flagged walk toward us. Behind its shelter the voice of Miss Andrews greeted us.

"Beatrice?" we asked with one voice.

Miss Andrews beamed. "Out of danger, thank you!"

Virginia Wheatley nervously excused herself and departed with a muttered word about letting some of the other girls know.

"Yes," Miss Andrews said, "the Dean left for dinner a little while ago, and I'm off for a hurried bite. Oh, it's all right!" This in response to a horrified move from Squeakie. "She's much too weak to try anything again. Janice is with her, and Veronica and her father are downstairs. We thought it better to leave them below, in case there's still emotional antagonism to her father's marriage. We don't want her upset now. All she needs is rest, and perhaps, a little later, some warm milk. The poor child seems to have forgotten. . . . She insists she didn't take anything. I'll hurry back!"

She stared in shocked surprise. Squeakie had suddenly started to run

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in the direction of the guest house. Agatha and I caught up with her at the door. Without a word she led us firmly into the sitting room where an agonized Mr. Coburn was being consoled by a shaken Veronica Blake.

"She wouldn't talk to me!" he was saying. "They say it's better if I stay away. I didn't mean to be hard on her. I . . ." His voice broke.

Squeakie nudged Agatha who stepped forward and began to say all the right things. I couldn't think of anything to say so I stood there feeling foolish. A stealthy creak made me turn my head just in time to see Squeakie vanish through the door. Anxious to be anywhere but where I was, I followed her. Raising a warning finger to her lips she began to tiptoe up the stairs with the elaborate caution of an amateur cat-burglar. Feeling even more foolish, I did likewise. Passing Beatrice's room she led me into the tiny anteroom that Miss Andrews had used as an infirmary.

The room was empty and, except for a little warm milk left standing in the bottom of a saucepan on a portable electric plate, everything was just as it had been before. The hypodermic was still lying beside the bottle of strychnine. Squeakie grabbed the bottle and measured it quickly with her eyes. She looked a little sick.

Noiselessly, with infinite care, she opened the door leading into the sickroom just a crack. On the table inside the bedroom, beside the door, we could see a glass of milk. Squeakie's hand moved out, but before she could push the door farther in, another hand — inside the room — picked up the glass and took it away.

A familiar voice said, "Now, Beatrice, if you'll drink this? Miss Andrews says it will make you feel better and give you strength. It may taste funny. Everything will for a few hours. It's the effect of the antidote they gave you. I'll help you sit up."

All this time Squeakie had been gesturing violently at me. "Fill the hypodermic with milk!" she whispered, giving me a push. As I tipped the saucepan and worked the plunger I was aware of Squeakie shouting to someone through the open door. "Don't drink that! Give me that milk!" The barrel filled with the white fluid, and I slipped it into the hand that Squeakie was waving at me behind her back.

I saw over her head into the room beyond. Janice Blake was smiling, standing at the washstand in the corner, coolly pouring the contents of the glass down the sink. "Very well," she said, carefully rinsing the glass. "if you don't want her to have it you have only to say so. But Miss Andrews said . . ."

Squeakie looked very white and rather frightened but she walked steadily across the room toward the girl. Squeakie was holding the hypodermic poised, like a weapon.

"My God; Squeakie!" I said. "You can't do that!"

She spoke to Janice without even indicating that she had heard me. "I was standing behind the door while

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the glass was on this table," she told her. "I filled the hypodermic from that glass. It's no use keeping it for analysis. You'd find some way to pin the whole thing on Miss Andrews."

"The milk was all right!" Janice insisted, backing away from her. "I was just annoyed because you told me not to give it to her."

"I'm glad to hear it," Squeakie said, and I turned cold all over. I hadn't known she could sound like that. "I'm glad to hear it, because this way you won't object to *proving* it. A pure milk injection never hurt anyone. Grab her, David!"

I grabbed the squirming girl. It was a moment I'll not forget in a hurry. She fought me like an animal, tooth and nail. Squeakie, her face frozen and stiff, took one of the girl's threshing arms, pinched the flesh and poised the needle.

"Don't, don't!" The terror-stricken girl seemed to dissolve as I held her. "Don't — it's poison!"

She began to sob. Squeakie's hand fell nervously and the hypodermic smashed on the floor. I let the girl go just in time to catch Squeakie. I stood there with a fainting wife on one hand, a very hysterical murderess on the other, and a white shocked patient staring at me from the bed.

"Agatha!" I yelled. "For God's sake. . . !"

Agatha came flying up the stairs, followed by others. After a glance Agatha concentrated on Squeakie. Veronica Blake held her shrieking sister, and Henry Coburn took his badly frightened daughter in his arms. I grabbed the phone.

"Listen!" I said, when I heard the voice of Chief Harding, "I can't stand any more of this. I'm from the *Herald*, and you're to get over here if you have to swim! Yes, we've got your murderess!"

The post mortem took place later over hot buttered rum in front of Agatha's fireplace. Chief Prescott Harding, who had arrived some time before, in a rowboat half full of water, to take charge of his prisoner, was gently steaming in front of the blaze. Every so often he would send a speculative gaze in Squeakie's direction, but she seemed miles away, totally immersed in hot rum and her fancies.

At last he gave a little dry cough. "Mrs. Meadow," he said deferentially, "How did you guess?"

"Guess!" Squeakie snorted. "Guess!"

Chief Harding looked uncomfortable.

"Nothing less than a grovel will do it," I warned him. "How are you at groveling, Chief?"

He shook his head and smiled. "If there's anything I have done that offended Mrs. Meadow, I'm very . . ."

Squeakie waved his apologies grandly aside. "It's not me. It's the spirit of it, the injustice! Women these days are running the world. Have you revised your opinion of women, Chief Harding?"

His grim mouth relaxed and he took a swallow of rum. "In general, no, Mrs. Meadow. In particular, yes."

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He raised his glass and made her a little bow. It was graciously done. Squeakie started to thaw. With a skill unusual in such an unpracticed hand he fed her a few more charming bits about how remarkable a truly remarkable woman is. You could almost hear Squeakie purring. In no time at all they got very chatty.

"There were three things that bothered me," Squeakie informed us. "Janice being at Mitford at all, the nightly glass of beer, and the painful associations that were obviously connected in Beatrice's mind with horns."

Chief Harding looked blank. "It's an old Shakespearean custom," I explained. "Young wives decorated their old husbands with them."

"Please," Squeakie said, "let me tell it. You'll only confuse him."

"After all," Squeakie said, "why should Janice, supported by her hard-working sister, go to an exclusive and expensive college like Mitford? There are dozens of colleges more suitable. I concluded that Janice was spoiled and socially ambitious. Also, it was obvious when I saw her that Veronica Blake's efficiency, as it is in so many business women, was only a shield for her very real weakness. Janice expected to be pampered by Veronica; Veronica thought there was a special virtue in doing the pampering. She cheerfully sacrificed many things to indulge her little sister, fondly believing that she was making up to her for the home life Janice had missed. Unfortunately that sort of thing rarely reaps gratitude. The appetite grows by what it feeds upon. The more Janice had, the more she wanted. Mink coats, cars, country club dances, admiration, power!" Squeakie shook her head sadly.

"Her sister's approaching marriage promised her all of them. For the first time she probably respected Veronica. This was feathering your nest in the approved manner of a Henry G. Lane heroine! There was nothing more to Janice's taste than to be the spoiled daughter of a wealthy man. But unfortunately Mr. Coburn *had* a daughter!

"We can easily reconstruct the situation. So far as Janice was concerned, Mr. Coburn's duty to his future wife's little sister did not seem to include the right things. Janice should have an education let's say, and a good job to start out. But no mink coats. You can imagine how furious Janice would be with what she considered Veronica's bungling.

"Then Beatrice played right into Janice's hands by objecting to living with her father after his marriage. Janice dropped a thoughtful suggestion into Veronica's ear, and with the best intentions in the world Veronica and Henry Coburn sent Beatrice to Mitford. Under the guise of friendship Janice quietly began to torture the girl who stood between her and dreams of luxury."

"Darling," I said. "You can't possibly know all this. Aren't you dressing it up a little?"

Squeakie looked at me in amazement. "Does a scientist need a whole

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skeleton to reconstruct a Dinosaur?" she asked me. "No, he uses a handful of bones and his head. I'm using my head and a handful of facts, but I have to put a little flesh on them."

"You're mixing your metaphors or something," I pointed out.

Squeakie sighed and went on: "The poor child of divorce is always on the defensive, trying to protect first one parent then the other. Beatrice did the natural thing, psychologically: she tried to justify the situation to Janice, explaining that her mother and father hadn't been in love for years; that they had kept their home together only until she was old enough to understand. But even as she must have repeated the careful story, her confidence became shaken. Can't you see Janice smiling at Beatrice very gently? She wasn't going to be the one, Janice's smile said, to tell poor Beatrice the truth! Oh?" Squeakie said with a shudder. "Can't you just see it?"

"This," I said, "is not a very nice story."

"No wonder Beatrice was so nervous and couldn't sleep," Agatha said.

Squeakie nodded. "Naturally Beatrice's doubts grew as Janice planned they should. At last Janice allowed herself to be persuaded — she told Beatrice the 'truth.' Beatrice's mother had lovers! It was pure fantasy, of course, but Beatrice didn't suspect evil, and the shock was merciless. There," Squeakie said, "you have the secret of her inability to speak the lines from *As You Like It.* To her they were a mockery of her deceived father."

"But . . ." Agatha began.

"Yes," Squeakie said. "Janice discovered that she had gone too far, had induced her sadism unwisely. It backfired. Beatrice refused even to see her puzzled mother, and offered to live with her father and his wife! There was only one thing left for Janice to do. She had to discredit the penitent Beatrice in her *father's* eyes. Her devious plotting," Squeakie said softly, "was bringing her nearer and nearer to murder!

"Edward Haven was probably one of Janice's conquests. She probably told him that she wanted to play a practical joke to 'wake up' her friend, whom she described as a prig and a grind. Of course, there was no thought of seduction. Beatrice was just to be embarrassed. The whole thing sounded no rougher to him than countless other college pranks he'd heard of. He agreed to engineer the night in the woods.

"But evil is a dangerous and complicated weapon. Sooner or later, as she threaded her way through the maze of scheming, it occurred to Janice that it would be much simpler if Beatrice just died! Under the existing circumstances suicide would be perfectly credible. So, David, the beer! You'll notice that the suggestion came from Virginia Wheatley. It wasn't very difficult, I imagine, for Janice to get all her ideas delivered by Virginia. The use of the book with the pencilled notation was a trail coverer.

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Nothing must lead back to Janice!"

"But why the beer?" I said.

"Because, darling, at first, Janice intended to use belladonna. It's bitter to the taste. Therefore, beer, in which bitterness would go unnoticed! When the beer was forbidden, the murder plan had to be revised. Besides, Janice had her hands full in other quarters. The young man was showing signs of remorse. He wanted to tell Beatrice's father the whole story, and he wanted to talk to Beatrice!

"He got a message to her — probably it was slipped on a dinner tray by the obliging Virginia. Beatrice went to meet him. Virginia blabbed the romantic news to Janice. Janice followed Beatrice to the rendezvous."

"Wait a minute," Chief Harding said. "There weren't any footprints but Beatrice's, and she went twice!"

"No," Squeakie shook her head. "She went once, obviously followed by Janice who could have walked in the shadow of the woods where you didn't look and where the prints would now be obliterated. Janice heard Edward Haven tell Beatrice that he wanted to marry her. It didn't matter to Janice that Beatrice refused him and left the dejected young man sitting in his car. He had talked, and he would talk again! Blind with fury she left her hiding place, but returned a few minutes later *wearing a pair of Beatrice's shoes* that she had taken from the dormitory closet. Go and get the shoes, David!"

When I came back with them Squeakie was busily explaining to an astounded Chief Harding that this make and style of shoe was worn practically all the time by half the girls at Mitford. Beatrice herself had more than four pairs. All had received hard wear and would make almost identical prints. "You'll find Harper's Lane mud on these too," she said. "Then Janice killed him with his own hammer. The evidence would point to Beatrice, and before Beatrice could be arrested she was going to 'confess' by 'committing suicide'!

"Since neither tea nor milk is a good medium in which to administer belladonna, she substituted aconite ground from the roots of plants growing near the arboretum. She put the brew into the teapot and called for the dishes herself to be sure they were washed clean in time. And that," said Squeakie with a complacency that took my breath away, "is all, I think."

"You told her the milk in the hypo was poisoned," I said accusingly.

"Well, I had to frighten her into confessing. There wasn't anyone else to do it but me!" This last I rightly interpreted as a play for Chief Harding's sympathy.

I looked at him. The wonder in his eyes was mingled with a primitive fear. If Squeakie thought that she had made him lose his distrust of women, she was mistaken. I think she was terribly put out when he came across the room and shook *my* hand with real feeling.

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Remember Ben Wilson's unusual story, "Just an Old-Fashioned Murder," published in the January 1945 issue of EQMM? We've been looking forward to a return visit by Ben Wilson, knowing that his second story would be as unusual as his first. Well, here it is — a short-short about a detective named Michael Wren and a criminal named Granvy, and in the tradition of cops-and-robbers one man is chasing the other. And what is unusual about that? Only this: in Ben Wilson's version the crook is chasing the detective!

NOT ON THE PROGRAM

by BEN WILSON

THE SUN was almost directly overhead, so Michael Wren found no cooling shadows on either side of Mechanic Street. He cast envious glances at the passersby in shirtsleeves, and was tempted into a movement to unbutton his coat, but thought better of it.

It was when he turned onto Cortland Street that he first noticed the man following him. Michael hurried through the alley that led to Michigan Avenue — and a glance over his shoulder showed him that the man had started through the alley, too.

Michael slipped through the door of a ten-cent store — through the shoppers and then out onto Michigan.

The man hadn't been fooled, for when Michael reached the newsstand farther up the street, the man was behind him again.

Michael flipped a nickel at the boy, and picked up an issue of the *Citizen-Patriot* as he walked past. An extra, the bold headlines told him all he needed to know: "KILLER ESCAPES PRISON".

There was a picture of the escaped convict. Michael didn't need the quick look he took to know that the original of that picture was weaving through the crowds behind him.

"Granvy!" Michael exclaimed. He hop-scotched across the street, not waiting for the "walk" signal, and slipped like a cog into the revolving door of the hotel.

The board in the lobby listing the activities of the week said: "Executive Club Luncheon Today — Guest Speaker, Detective Michael Wren."

Michael walked past the elevators and leaped the wide stairs three steps at a time. "Fine thing," he said. "Me with no gun and no time to get one."

On the second floor he walked into an anteroom and opened a door a crack. The buzz and drone of forty or fifty men could be heard above the clatter of knives and forks on plates. He closed the door again. "No sense exposing them to that maniac," he said. "I'd better stay out here."

He tossed the newspaper onto a

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chair, and as it flopped open, a sentence in the prison-escape story came into focus under his eyes: "— it was the clever detective work of Michael Wren that led to the conviction of Granvy in October 1936." He heard again the harsh voice of Granvy in the courtroom: "I'll get you, Wren. I'll get you good!"

The silencer on the .38 in Granvy's tense hand made the gun look weird, futuristic. Michael forced his eyes off the menace of the gun — looked at Granvy's narrow face.

"Yeah, look. Take a good look," Granvy said. "Me with a complexion like the belly of a fish, and you so healthy you're bulging out of your clothes."

Michael saw the almost imperceptible movement of the gun. "Here it comes," he thought. "Oh, dear God, not in the head, please!"

"Take it, copper!" Granvy's face was convulsed; his feet spread wide.

There were six *pops* from the silenced gun — six staggering blows to Michael's body that drove him back against the wall, gasping.

A man stuck his head through the door from the luncheon room. "Oh, there you are, Mr. Wren," he said. "We're all ready." He went back into the room, leaving the door open.

Michael hurled himself from the wall, reaching for his hip pocket. Handcuffs clicked on Granvy's wrists.

Granvy looked stupidly from the handcuffs to the gun that Michael had wrenched from him.

The nasal voice of a man in the luncheon room announced: "And now here is Detective Michael Wren. We're going to have Harry James shoot at him. Mr. Wren is going to give us a demonstration of a bullet-proof vest."

FOR MYSTERY LOVERS — The publishers of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE also publish the following paper-covered mystery books at 25¢ each:

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Here is the second detective short story created by Leonard Thompson — at the time of this writing, still 16 years old. Again, in the footsteps of John Dickson Carr, it is the tale of an "impossible" crime, and again young Thompson uses his tough old legal beagle to take the "im" out of "impossible."

Whenever a new author, especially a complete unknown and more especially a teen-ager, makes the grade with EQMM, a lengthy and exhilarating correspondence takes place between editor and writer. There is so much to talk over: possible changes in plot; resultant rewriting; exchange of opinions on technique, on style, on "ideas"; the multitudinous minutiæ of literary detection. Such a correspondence was born the moment your Editor accepted Leonard Thompson's first story, "Squeeze Play;" it sprang instantly into being, "fully grown and armed to the teeth." Would the average reader, even he who reads and runs, be interested in this epistolary criticism? Would the average reader, as a sort of literary tourist, like to explore the Land of Creative Criminalia? Perhaps not; but your Editor has never thought of EQMM readers as average readers. We have the conviction that you would like to go behind the scenes, see how detective stories are made, how they are worked on, shaped, and polished — discover, in a phrase, what makes them tick.

We are going to give you that opportunity to become an insider — to the extent, at least, of sharing some of the secrets of editorial criticism. At the end of this, Leonard Thompson's second story, we shall quote excerpts from your Editor's letters to Master Thompson. But read the story first — so that none of the excerpts will serve to give away the plot, and thus spoil your enjoyment and appreciation of this second remarkable achievement by a 16-year-old writer; and while you are reading "Close Shave," judge for yourself what progress young Leonard has made, in daring conception of plot, in toughening of expression, in tightening of technique, and in potent promise for the future. You may not know it, dear reader, but you are in on the ground floor of an extraordinary phenomenon — witnessing the development of a young writer who should, some day, be one of our most shining lights.

CLOSE SHAVE

by LEONARD THOMPSON

GRAY clumped his foot down on the brass bar rail, regarded the plump bartender with bleary eyes, slid the empty glass across wood.

"What's her name?"

"Don't know." The bartender managed a slight shrug with large shoulders. "She's in the back room there.

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See the red door? Said to ask you if your name was William Gray, and if you were, would you *please* see her." Somewhere, deep in his chest, he was laughing, "Girl friend?"

Gray ran a thin-fingered hand through his graying hair, laughed an "Oh, sure," and clinked a quarter on the bar.

Shutting the red door behind him, he took a brief glance at the dull, grimy walls, then centered his attention on the girl sitting at the round table in the center of the room. She looked a young twenty, or an old eighteen, with a small, white face.

He scraped a chair over to the table, sat down.

"Cigarette?" He offered her a crumpled package.

She hesitated, then shook her head.

"You don't belong in a place like this." He fingernailed a match, watched it sputter, lit the cigarette. "What do you want?"

"I-I've heard my father mention you. He used to tell me that you were once — a pretty good criminal lawyer."

"Your father?"

"Yes. Edward Sparrow."

The creases in Gray's forehead lengthened.

"Coming from the most successful criminal lawyer in the country, that's a compliment."

Her brightly painted lips parted in a mixture of a sigh and a feeble laugh.

"Yes — that's what's so — funny. Dad's defended hundreds of men for murder, and now . . . he can't defend himself."

"He's been arrested for — murder?"

She nodded, nervously opening a small purse, dropping an envelope on the table.

"What's in it?"

"Eleven thousand dollars. It's all my mother and I could raise."

"You want *me* to defend Edward Sparrow?"

"Yes. No one else will touch the case. If I hadn't remembered dad mentioning you . . ."

"Why can't he defend himself?"

"Because — because it's impossible for anyone *but* my father to have committed the crime. And I don't care if he did . . . kill Tony. He's my father, and I want you to save him."

"Does *he* say he killed this Tony?"

"No. But . . . well he *must* have. No one else possibly could."

Gray smiled. "And you want *me* to save him?"

"Yes. Bribe the jury. Pay witnesses . . . anything."

Gray laughed.

"Your father must have been telling you some pretty wicked stories about me. I don't bribe jurors and I don't pay witnesses. If I can't free a client legally, guilty or not, then I don't bother."

She said nothing, not even looking at him.

"All right, tell me about it." Gray rested a knee against the table, exhaling a combination of alcohol and smoke.

"I'll take that cigarette now."

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The cigarette shook in her lips. She quickly lit it, then pulled it from her mouth.

"Anthony Wills was an artist. My father wanted a portrait of himself done, and he went to Tony. They were friends; good friends. Dad had just finished a trying case, and decided to go to his cottage in the country. He always went there when a case fatigued him, and it seemed a perfect place to have the picture painted. Dad's brother, Phillip, lives with us. My mother, dad, Phillip and I rode to the cottage with Tony. He was laughing, telling those lurid jokes of his — making us laugh. The car stopped in front of the cottage. It's one of those single-floor cottages, with a red roof, green . . ."

Gray waved a hand.

"Never mind the beautiful descriptions. The car stopped . . . ?"

She sighed, shrugged small shoulders.

"We got out. Dad walked up the stairs, taking out his keys, opening the door. Tony followed him into the cottage. My mother noticed the fresh flowers, and we stopped to pick some, by the road . . ."

"Wait a minute. Why did you, your mother, and your uncle go along in the first place?"

She frowned, puffing smoke.

"We were going to stay only for the day. My mother was going to clean the cottage for father and Tony."

"Then you were going to leave later?"

"Yes. After dinner."

She inhaled smoke. Her face suddenly contorted, she coughed.

Gray laughed, showing brown-stained teeth.

"You haven't been smoking very long."

"I —" If the light had not been dim, he would have seen her blush. "This is my first cigarette . . ."

Gray laughed again. "Go ahead, you and your mother stopped to pick flowers . . ."

She hastily dropped the cigarette to the floor, stepping on it.

"Yes. We stopped to pick flowers. Phillip shouted that he was — very thirsty. He ran around the side of the house, so that he could get a bottle of wine from the cellar.

"I've got to explain something to you. Tony had recently been to Canada, and while there had grown a three-day growth of beard. It was shaggy, and didn't suit him. But he wouldn't shave it. We all joked about it, and he said he'd compromise. That he'd shave it off as soon as he arrived at the cottage. The whole thing was childish — Tony was like that. Always gay, always . . . "

"Let's get back to your father."

"All right. I heard my father laugh, and Tony said very well, he'd shave the damn thing off right then and there . . . The rest is what my father told the police."

"Let's hear it."

"He and Tony went into the bathroom. Tony rolled up his sleeves, picked up my father's electric razor, shoved the plug into the wall socket,

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and started shaving the left side of his face. My father said that he was going to leave the room, and Tony nodded. But while dad was leaving, he noticed an old smoking jacket of his that he'd thought he'd lost, hanging on the inside of the bathroom door. He shut the door, and removed the jacket from its peg. He was still in the room, with his back to Tony. Then he heard the razor drop. He turned around. The mirror is just above the wash bowl, and Tony was standing there, looking into the mirror. . . . There was a bullet hole near his neck. The bullet must have hit an artery, because blood was pouring out, running down the drain. . . ."

She stopped.

"What did your father do?"

"What could he do? He just stood there and . . . watched Tony die. It happened so quickly, before he knew what was going on. Tony flopped to the floor, trying to say something. He couldn't. He gurgled, his body jerked a few times, then . . . he died. My father knelt next to him, saw that he was dead. Then he wanted to wash his hands. They were . . . wet. But the water wouldn't run. Then he turned from the basin, looked down at Tony and . . . fainted."

She paused, looking at Gray as though expecting a question.

"That's how we found him." She squirmed in the chair. "Phillip came from around the corner of the house, gloating over a bottle of wine, and called to my mother — we had wandered off, out of sight — and the three of us went into the cottage . . . and found them both in the bathroom. Phillip took the car, found some state troopers — and that's all."

Gray lifted his head, blinking slowly.

"Was the door to the bathroom shut when you found them?"

"Yes."

"Then, when the murder occurred, the door was shut, and the two of them were alone in the lavatory. Was there a window?"

"Yes. But it was locked, rusted into place."

"Do you believe your father's story?"

"I want to — but how can I? He's the only one who could have killed Tony. . . ."

"Wills must have been shot while your father was looking at the smoking jacket. Could the door have been opened . . . ?"

"No. Dad had his eyes on it. It didn't move."

Gray slid back the chair, stood up.

"Motive? They must have a motive against him."

She slowly got to her feet, clasping the handbag.

"Tony had a wife. She died. My father had once thought of — marrying her. The police think he killed Wills because of the treatment she received while she was married. Tony isn't — wasn't the type to have a wife. He neglected her. She died a year ago of childbirth — the baby too. Tony was in Canada."

"How did Wills take it?"

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"He didn't care one way or the other."

"Lovable cuss."

He glanced down at the envelope on the table.

"Can you raise any more money?"

"Isn't eleven thous . . ."

"No. It isn't. I want more."

She clenched her teeth.

"You're a leech."

Gray grinned. "I'm a lawyer."

"How do I know you can save my father? Maybe you . . ."

"Maybe a lot of things. If you don't trust me, get out, and take your money with you."

"No — I'll get you more."

Gray shrugged, sleepy-eyed. "Okay. Now let's get out of here. I'm hungry."

Gray frowned at the no-smoking sign, glanced at a large brown cuspidor, and said to the policeman: "Edward Sparrow."

"What's your name?"

"Gray. I'm his lawyer."

"You are, huh?" The officer yawned. "He didn't have a lawyer when we locked him up."

"He's got one now. Tell him I'm here."

The guard grunted a "sure," disappeared through a door. When he returned, he was prodding a tall, lean man, whose hair, brown and uncombed, looked as though a hand had been constantly passed through it.

Gray sat on the opposite side of the wire mesh, facing Sparrow. The guard lingered. Gray smiled, stared at him until he moved out of ear-shot.

"Don't talk loudly. I've seen your daughter. She's retained me for your defense."

Sparrow bent forwards, swallowing.

"Julie? She would go. . . . Never mind. You've heard the details?"

Gray nodded.

"Then you must be insane if you think you can offer a feasible defense."

Gray moved closer to the wire mesh.

"Tell me the truth, Sparrow. Are you guilty? If you are, tell me. Don't be stupid and lie. Now, *think*."

Sparrow stared into his eyes, blinking.

"No, Gray, I'm not guilty."

Gray smiled with the left side of his mouth. "I believe you. Now, listen. From what your daughter told me, I don't think you have much faith in me. I'm not the bum you think I am. . . ."

"Well I've heard so many . . ."

"Shut up. Get this straight. *I'm* your lawyer. *You* have nothing to do with the defense. You don't cross-examine witnesses, or make the jury cry with a tearful tale. Understand?"

Sparrow nodded hesitantly.

"Good. Your daughter gave me eleven thousand dollars and promised me more. I think you're worth still more. How much can you contribute?" He gave Sparrow one of his grinning leers.

"I was right. You are a bum. You want all you can get, don't you?"

Gray squinted, lips tightening.

"Call me that again and I'll walk

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out of here. Let's say another five thousand from you. Then there's something else. *I* want the publicity. When reporters visit you, build *me* up."

"If you can free me, I'll tell them you're a better lawyer than I am, and I'll mean it." He stopped. "Gray, what does Julie think? Does she . . ."

"She thinks you're guilty as hell. When we get into court, I'll change her mind."

"I hope you can."

"She didn't tell me something: did the police find the gun?"

"Yes. They found it. It was in the sitting room, stuffed down under a sofa cushion. They believe that I shot Tony, went out of the bathroom to hide the gun, walked back, then pretended to faint."

"What calibre is it?"

"A thirty-two — one of those short-barreled Colt Detective Specials. I suppose you found out that the gun —"

"Is yours? Yes, I know." Gray bent his head forward. "Now, take all the time you want to on this. Are you sure you heard no sounds while your back was turned to Wills?"

Sparrow frowned, running his tongue over his lips.

"The only thing I heard was Tony's razor, humming. I might have. . . . Oh, I don't know, Gray, I don't *know*. I — I've told the story so many times. . . . I'm sorry. I forget. I might have heard something else, but I can't remember. Sometimes I think I did kill him. I see that door that didn't move, hear Tony's gurgle. . . ."

"Shut up. The guards are looking at us. Smile. That's it. No matter what I say, smile. Did you love Wills's wife?"

"That's — yes. But when I met Ann, my wife, I forgot about her."

"Did you forget about her, or did Wills get her first?"

Sparrow almost scowled.

"Very well — Tony got her first."

"*Then* you married your wife?"

"Yes, then I married Ann."

"How'd you feel when Wills's wife died?"

"I don't know. I think I hated Tony then, but I forgot — and forgave."

Gray laughed. "You should have been an actor, Sparrow."

"I wasn't acting."

"Like hell, you weren't. 'I forgot — and forgave.' Don't Sparrow, I'm crying." He scraped the chair back, standing up. "I doubt if I'll have to see you again before the trial. Don't forget the reporters." He grinned, walked swiftly past the guard, lit a cigarette. As he walked down the stairs, he began to mumble a long string of swear words.

In the small, three-walled cubbyhole of a booth, Gray ground beef between his teeth, smiled across at District Attorney Abbott, slowly shook his head.

"Fat as you are, Abbott, I thought you'd eat more than a sandwich. Particularly after a gruelling two-hour direct examination."

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Abbott didn't smile.

"You had that Sparrow girl ready all right. I thought I'd have to use a crow-bar to open her mouth. Those evasive answers . . ."

Gray flicked nonexistent specks from the sleeve of his brown tweed suit, shoved his plate aside, wrapped a hand around his coffee cup.

"You look sick, Abbott. Aren't you satisfied with your questions this morning?"

"It isn't that." Abbott puffed cigar smoke. "It's you. Sparrow's guilty; his own statement proves that. Yet you're defending him. And on a plea of innocence. You might have tried temporary insanity."

Gray lit a cigarette, relaxing. "Sparrow *is* innocent. You've been dying to see a first-rate criminal lawyer squirming in court. When this case came along, you fit the facts to suit yourself."

Abbott lowered heavy eyelids, coughing.

"Look, Gray. I'm not like that. I don't want innocent people sitting in the chair. The facts suited themselves. Don't you think I've spent sleepless nights studying the evidence? Hoping to find a loophole? Sparrow's important. I had to be positive. . . . He's the only possible murderer."

Gray sipped coffee, smiling.

"I can't imagine that hulk of yours going without sleep. You probably rested your heels on your desk, clamped your hands over your stomach, and dreamed of Sparrow, as they slit his pants' leg, buckled the straps, slapped the metal cap over his . . ."

"Shut up, Gray. It isn't funny. I don't live for convictions."

"No, but you'd probably die for one."

Abbott forced a weak smile.

Gray placed two pale green tablets on a palm, flipped them into his mouth, drank them down with the last of his coffee.

Abbott grinned. "Indigestion?"

Gray thumped the coffee cup to the table, shook his head.

"Alcohol. Catching up with me. Faster than I want it to . . ."

Phillip Sparrow took the stand as the second witness for the State.

"You are the defendant's brother?" asked Abbott, hands bulging in his pockets, sitting half on, half off the prosecutor's table.

"Yeah." Phillip Sparrow's loose face seemed to be set in a flabby leer.

"We'll pass over your journey to the cellar." Abbott waved a hand. "You accompanied the defendant's wife and her daughter into the cottage. When you opened the lavatory door, what did you see?"

"Wills was lying on the floor, near the wash bowl. My brother was next to him. There was a lot of blood. An electric razor was buzzing on the floor."

"What did you do?"

"I saw that Wills didn't need anybody's help, so I woke my brother up. He said something about blood — on his hands. I asked what the — what happened. He told me he'd been alone

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with Wills, that the door had been shut —" he grunted a laugh — "and that he didn't do it. I told him he was lying, and that I wanted the truth before getting the police. He said he wasn't lying, that he'd fainted. He promised me that he wouldn't leave if I went for the police, so I went."

"Did you notice a gun?"

"No."

"Before her death, what was your brother's attitude toward Wills's wife?"

Slumped beside Gray, Edward Sparrow covered his eyes Indian fashion with a trembling hand.

"He said he felt sorry for her, married to a guy like Wills."

"How did he react when she died?"

"He wanted to kill Wills."

Gray jerked forward, jumping up, twitching the left side of his mouth.

"Your Honor, whatever my client is, he's a sensible man. *If* he were going to kill a man, he most certainly wouldn't tell that loose-lipped bum!"

His Honor barely caught his glasses as they fell from his thin nose.

"Say, who do you . . ." Phillip Sparrow lifted a plump body from the witness chair, snarling.

"You will retract that statement, Mr. Gray." The Court drooped his lips in disgust.

"I will not." Gray crossed his arms. "You can't deny that his lips hang loosely. Why, look at that mass of fat he calls a face! And he's never worked a day of his life, so he's a bum."

A juror laughed.

Judge Wiengate glared at the spectators, stifling smiles, and turned to the witness.

"Mr. Sparrow, did your brother actually *tell* you that he intended to murder the deceased?"

"Well . . . no. But what right has that guy . . ." He motioned towards Gray's smiling face.

"Mr. Gray." His Honor sighed, looked down at Gray. "I think it will be to the best interests of all concerned if you refrain from any degrading remarks."

"That was *not* a degrading remark. It was the truth."

"Very well! *Uncomplimentary* remarks."

"That's better." Gray sat down.

Judge Wiengate muttered something, turned to Abbott.

"You may continue, prosecutor."

Abbott's huge face showed a worried expression.

"Ah. . . . That's all. You may cross-examine."

Gray patted his client's shoulder, slightly adjusted a brown and yellow striped tie, stood up. He sniffed the white rose in his lapel.

"Do you drink a great deal?" Gray demanded suddenly.

"No. Just about normal." Phillip grinned, eyes half-shut.

"Normal? I suppose that's why you've been arrested five times for drunken and disorderly conduct?"

Abbott didn't object, he frowned.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" Phillip widened his grin, hanging an arm limply over the chair arm.

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"You were in the cellar when the murder occurred?" Gray almost whispered.

"I don't know. You see, I can't tell you *when* Wills was murdered."

"No one *saw* you enter the cellar?"

"No. But don't worry, I was there."

"Were you?" Gray looked him up slowly, then down slowly, shaking his head, clacking his tongue.

"Yeah, I was!"

Gray raised his left eyebrow.

"You were? And how did you get into the cellar without asking your brother for the key?"

Phillip Sparrow didn't leer. His jaw drooped, along with his shoulders. His brother, wide-eyed, stared at Phillip's now white face.

Gray studied immaculate fingernails, rubbed them against a lapel, spoke without lifting his head.

"Well? Did you float through the door?"

"I — I guess it was unlocked."

Gray laughed. "Oh, your brother leaves the cottage for three months, and thoughtfully left the cellar door open. Did he tack up a sign: Burglars Welcome?"

"I d-don't know. It was open — Please, you've gotta believe me!"

Gray smiled. "All right. You don't have to cry. Now we've heard a great deal about my client's feelings for Wills's wife. Just what were *yours?*"

"I — what do you mean?"

Gray bent forward.

"You know what I mean. Six months before she married Wills, she and you applied for a marriage license."

A photographer caught the contorted expression on Phillip's face. Gray's client leaped to his feet, wild-eyed, mouth open. An accumulation of murmurs spread through the benches.

"You're lyin'! You're lyin'!" screamed Phillip.

"Am I?" Gray waved a piece of paper. "Here's the record. Why didn't you marry her?"

Phillip twisted one fat hand into the other.

". . . Wills . . ."

Edward Sparrow threw his head back and laughed bitterly.

"You too! . . . Oh, God, you too!"

Judge Wiengate called a fifteen minute recess.

Gray walked to his table, frowned at his client, tapped a cigarette against a fingernail. He waited until the last juror had shuffled out of the courtroom, turned, slapped Sparrow.

"Remember: smile."

"I don't — I don't see . . ."

"You don't have to. And stop slouching. You look guilty as hell."

Sparrow tried to smile.

"Gray. I — I've been thinking. I could plead guilty, say the gun went off accidentally." He avoided Gray's stare.

Gray grinned. "You could — but you won't."

A stocky police guard growled a "c'mon," and Sparrow stood up.

"I guess I won't."

Phillip Sparrow was back on the

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stand, one of his feet curled around the leg of the chair, nibbling at a knuckle, not looking at his brother.

Gray tapped a fountain pen against Phillip's knee.

"You know that the murder weapon was found in a chair in the sitting room?"

"Yes."

"Then, when all three of you — your sister-in-law, her daughter, and you — were in the cottage, each of you could have placed it there in the excitement following your discovery of the crime?"

Abbott rose from his chair. "Your Honor, I object to counsel's intimidating tactics. They are . . ."

Gray waved his hands impatiently. "Your Honor, it is perfectly within my rights to show that other persons besides my client had the same opportunities he had."

"Answer him," ordered Judge Wiengate.

"I —" Phillip faltered, "I — *I* didn't put it there. . . ."

Gray pivoted on his heels, nodding to Abbott.

"That's all. Call your next witness."

The County Medical Examiner, a small, tight-lipped, black-haired Portuguese, sat on the edge of the witness chair, clamped hands on knees, and waited for Abbott to begin.

"Doctor, would you please give the Court the results of your examination of the deceased?"

"Died in two or three minutes. Bullet severed jugular vein. No powder burns."

"If the gun had been shot through a piece of cloth, there would be no powder burns?"

Judge Wiengate shook his head. "That's a leading question, Mr. Abbott."

Gray spoke from his chair. "No objection, Your Honor. I'm willing to concede that a cloth was used."

His client glanced at him quickly.

"Yes." The Medical Examiner moved forward. "If a cloth were used, there would be no powder burns. Besides, the bullet was discharged at a distance of about five feet."

Abbott nodded. "Now, can you give us any information concerning the angle of the bullet's path?"

"It traveled from under the jaw bone, through the left cheek, at an angle of about thirty degrees."

"How do you account for this?"

"Wills was shaving the left side of his face when the bullet struck him. When a man shaves, he cocks his head to one side, so Wills had his head inclined at a left slant. The bullet entered at the jaw bone, and traveled upwards. But when his head returned to its normal position, the angle became approximately thirty degrees. The killer, in my opinion, stood about five feet away from Wills, firing from a low chest position."

"Did you make a physical examination of the defendant?"

"Yes. I found him to be in excellent health, and hardly likely to faint."

"Thank you. Cross-examine."

Abbott watched Gray closely, as he

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walked to the stand, leaned against the jury box.

Gray smiled, lifting his eyebrows. "Have you ever shaved, doctor?"

"Twice a day."

"Then you must be thick-headed. When a man shaves the left side of his face, he cocks his head to the *right!*"

Twelve male heads nodded, some jurors going through the motions of shaving.

"That's — well, it couldn't be — that would — " The doctor shrugged, smacking dry lips.

"That would throw your theory out of kilter, wouldn't it?" Gray straightened, spreading his feet apart. "Are you a psychologist?"

"No — of course not."

"But fainting, in this case, would mainly depend on psychological reactions. So how can you state that my client wasn't likely to faint?"

"I — gave a physician's diagnosis. I'll admit it isn't conclusive."

"Yes, a physician who makes a living slicing up bodies." Gray looked as though someone in the front row had carried a dead fish into the courtroom. "Are you trying to tell these twelve sensible men that my client pulled out a gun, shoved a cloth over the muzzle, aimed it, pulled the trigger, *while Wills just ignored him, and continued shaving?*"

At ten-fifteen the next morning a tall, thin, spectacled, cross-eyed man sat in the witness chair and told the Court that he was a ballistics expert.

Gray sipped coffee from a paper cup, whispering to Sparrow.

Abbott shook something in his hand, and stood before the chair, sleepy-eyed.

"Are these five bullets the remaining cartridges found in the murder weapon?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell the jury what you discovered concerning them?"

The witness stretched his legs, faced the jury.

"All five cartridges are Smith and Wesson Longs. They are lead-headed. The heads have been filed criss-cross fashion."

"Why?"

"For greater killing power. The death bullet made a mess of Wills's head. On entering, it soon split into four separate pieces. The bullets are round-headed, and the filing didn't destroy the death bullet's penetrating power to any large extent. Looks like a fingernail file did the job."

"Do you think the filing shows premeditation?"

"Definitely. The killer planned on doing the job with one bullet."

Abbott handed the bullets to the foreman, told him to pass them along. When the last juror had finished examining them, Abbott dropped them into a pocket, shuffled around, turned to Gray. "Cross-examine."

Gray strutted to the stand.

"The bullets, cut up as they are, would also have greater *tearing* power wouldn't they?"

"I don't understand." The witness shoved his glasses into a firmer posi-

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tion with a tight-skinned finger.

"I mean, they would go through layers of cloth more easily?"

"Yes — I suppose so."

"That's all." Gray went back to his coffee.

Abbott looked at the judge, at the jury, stood his heavy body next to the Court recorder, and waved a hand.

"The State rests."

A photographer snapped a bulb, catching Abbott's hand as it twisted, fluttered to his side.

"You may open the case for the defense, counselor." Judge Wiengate was resting his head in the palm of a propped hand.

Gray slowly got to his feet, took a deep breath, turned to the jury.

"My client is innocent. It's my job to prove it. I will." He turned to the Clerk of the Court. "Call Miss Amelia Stevens."

Abbott narrowed his eyelids, glancing at the girl clicking her heels towards the witness chair. She was wearing loose slacks, a tight, striped sweater under a small jacket. She was sworn in, sat down, and smiled at the jurors.

Gray rested an elbow against the jury box.

"Your occupation, Miss Stevens?"

"I'm a plumber."

Abbott jumped up. "What did she say?"

Gray grinned. "You heard her. She's a plumber — female."

Abbott sat down, a weak expression of surprise on his face. Judge Wiengate, peering over his glasses at Miss Stevens, spoke to Gray: "Will her testimony be relevant, counselor?"

"Very relevant, Your Honor." Gray turned to the witness. "Now, Miss Stevens, will you please tell the Court what you did on Monday night."

She put her hands on her lap, moving her legs closer together.

"At seven o'clock that night I received a telephone call from you. You said that you wanted a plumber, and didn't care if I was a woman. I met you at a restaurant and we talked. You told me about Mr. Sparrow. Then you told me a — theory, under condition that I wouldn't speak of it to anyone. I had a beer, listening to you. When you finished, I said it was silly, that no one would ever think of it, let alone do it. You said that's exactly why it was done that way. I still wouldn't believe it. You said that you couldn't be wrong, and that if you were, you'd give me a thousand dollars . . ."

Edward Sparrow gawked.

". . . I asked you how you could prove it. You wanted to take me to the cottage. I said I didn't trust you, that I really didn't know who you were. You said, 'Too bad, I was going to give you five-hundred anyway. So long.' I went with you. Five hundred is five hundred, no matter how you count it. We reached the cottage about nine-thirty. The front door was locked. You shoved a foot through a window, raised it, and helped me in. You put on the lights, and we went to the bathroom. Then we went outside.

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The entrance to the cellar was padlocked — by the police, you said. You picked up a rock, broke the lock. You had a flashlight. We stayed in the cellar for ten minutes. I lost the thousand because you were right. We soon left the cottage and went to my house. Together we prepared a chart."

Gray walked to his table, opened a large brief-case, removed a cylindrical package, carelessly shoved the brief-case in front of Sparrow.

He handed the package to Miss Stevens.

"This is the chart. Are those the same pieces of candle wax you sealed the wrapper with?"

"Yes. It hasn't been opened."

Gray ripped the wrapper with a fingernail, and threw it on his table. He unrolled a heavy cardboard chart.

"And this is your signature, proving that you saw all that is pictured in the chart, along with me?"

"Yes. That's it."

Abbott, half out of his seat, blurted: "Just what *is* that chart?"

Gray turned, and snapped: "Listen, you've taken long enough to sit my client in the electric chair, give me a little time to take him out of it."

Abbott sat down. "Go ahead, Mr. Gray, go right ahead."

Gray tacked the chart to a large board, over the floor plan of the cottage. He picked up the wooden pointer, talking to the jury.

"As you see, this is a drawing of Wills as the bullet struck him when he was shaving. It not only shows the bathroom, but a portion of the cellar. It is drawn as though the wall in front of Wills didn't exist. Now I want you to follow me:

"When the Medical Examiner testified, he said the bullet entered at an upwards angle of about thirty degrees. He explained this by the tilt of a man's head when he shaves. But he was wrong about the tilt. It was a right tilt, not a left one. But what happens to that thirty-degree angle when the head is tilted to the right? It isn't a thirty-degree angle any more! No. Now the bullet's path is at *right angles to the floor.* In other words, the bullet came straight up from the floor. *Straight up!*"

He paused, glancing at a goggle-eyed Abbott.

Gray waved a hand. "How does a man shave? He stands in front of the mirror, getting as close to it as possible. Wills did this, and below him, in the center of the wash bowl, was the drain pipe outlet — *directly under his head . . .*"

Abbott rushed to the chart, mouth open.

Gray slapped him on the back. "Yes — the bullet was shot straight up the drain pipe."

"You're — that's impossible!" Abbott shouted.

Gray gave his head a queer tilt. "That's what I thought — for a while. But according to the bullet's angle of entrance, it was the only possible answer." He turned to Miss Stevens. "Tell them, Miss Stevens. Tell them the whole thing . . . I'm tired." He

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relaxed against the jury box.

She nodded quickly, stood up, took the pointer.

"It's really simple. The cottage is one-floored, so the drain pipe goes straight down into the cellar. Now, some drain pipes have the sanitary trap above the floor, in the bathroom. When I mentioned this to Mr. Gray, he said this one couldn't, that it *had* to be in the cellar. He was right. That was one of the reasons why we went to the cottage — to check. The pipe travels straight from the wash bowl, through the floor, into the cellar, continues straight for about two feet, then curves to form an arm, where the trap is located. We found a hole about an inch in diameter, filled with putty, where the pipe begins its curve. Mr. Gray chipped out the putty. You could look straight up into the bathroom and see the ceiling . . ."

No one moved. Gray was blinking slowly. Abbott's jaw seemed to be in a twitching fit.

". . . In the pipe, very close to the wash bowl, there had been a criss-cross piece of metal, to stop large articles from falling down the drain pipe. It had been sawed out. How many of you have ever noticed it, or would notice its absence. . . . As Mr. Gray said, Wills didn't, and he died. . . ."

"Wills was shaving with an electric razor. He didn't need any lather, and so he didn't need any water. But the murderer took no chances. Water might have spoiled the drain pipe trick, so it was shut off from the cellar. All you have to do is turn a valve. Naturally, it was turned on again after the murder. . . ."

Gray said, without looking up: "The cloth."

"Oh, yes. When you men shave, you keep your head in one position for about twenty seconds. The killer saw Wills' jaw over the pipe, and knew that he could count on that jaw staying there, long enough. Long enough for him to shove about four inches of cloth into *his* end of the pipe, without making any noise loud enough to be heard over the razor's humming. Then he shoved the muzzle of his gun against the cloth, parallel to the inside of the pipe, and pulled the trigger. He couldn't miss. He knew Wills' head was still there. All that it took was a steady hand."

She paused for a few seconds, licking dry lips.

". . . And the sound from the gun — you'd be surprised. Mr. Gray tried it. We couldn't find the same rag the killer had used. He said we wouldn't before we started. He used his own cloth, told me to go up to the bathroom, shut the door, and stay away from the bowl. I saw a hole appear in the ceiling — just like that — and at the same time a low — well, zhwung — it wasn't loud. I guess that's all. . . ."

"Your witness." Gray grinned at Abbott.

Abbott looked up at the bench. "Your Honor, if it pleases the Court, I would like to hear more from Mr. Gray."

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"By all means. Mr. Gray, if you have any further information —"

Gray mumbled an "all right," stood in front of the jury.

"It should be clear now that the murder must have been committed from the cellar. Committed by a man who had the same motive my client had. A man who knew that Wills was going to shave that beard when he did, who could have easily got my client's gun any time he wanted to, who had all the time in the world to destroy the cloth as he went to summon the police. Who must have watched his brother with nothing short of murderous hate as he rose to the heights as a wealthy criminal lawyer, while he himself remained a jobless, worthless . . ."

Phillip Sparrow, a broad grin on his face, walked from his seat, through the small swinging gate, and stood in back of Gray. He did it so quickly, that for a few moments the gun in his hand went unnoticed.

"All right, Gray — twitch a finger and I'll kill you. I'm walking out of here, you in front of me. Anybody try to stop me, and you get the whole clip in your back, get me?"

Behind him, his brother's hand delved into Gray's brief-case, came away with Gray's revolver.

"Phil — put that gun down — I don't want to —"

Phillip grunted, swirled quickly, trying to level his automatic.

He got two bullets in the chest.

Open-eyed, he kept walking; queer, jerky steps, blind, undirected. He seemed to laugh, gurgled, then flopped to the floor. A few women screamed.

Reporters, cameramen elbowed spectators aside, one yelling, rushing to the exit doors: "C'mon Charlie, I got it! Just as he shot him, I got it!"

Judge Wiengate was standing next to Gray. Gray waved a hand.

"There's your confession. . . ."

Abbott knelt, one-kneed, beside Phillip.

"He's dead."

Gray walked to Sparrow and took the gun. "Your brother's rat-bait, Sparrow." He moved his lips into a weak grin. "You shouldn't've done that, you might have hit *me*."

Sparrow wordlessly sat down, shaking his head, lips trembling.

Gray didn't replace the gun. He gripped it firmly, sat on the table, swinging a leg.

"All right, everybody, quiet! The show's not over — You guards at the doors, don't let anyone else out." He glanced at a frowning, but quiet, Judge Wiengate, and smiled at the faces.

"That's it. . . . If Phillip Sparrow hadn't been foolish just now, he would still be alive, and he could tell us something. Something about the person who planned Wills's death. Phillip was too stupid to plan so clever a murder. He was capable only of following orders. Someone else did the *thinking*.

"This murder was nothing but a morbid double-play. Wills is murdered; my client goes to the chair for

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it. My client was supposed to be alone in the house with Wills when he was murdered, the windows shut, locked on the inside. But it worked out even better than the murderers planned: he was actually in the room with Wills. But Phillip *didn't know that.* According to the original plan, he was to shoot Wills, come out of the cellar, and take the rest of the Sparrow family into the house with him as witnesses to his discovery of the crime. But my client told Wills that he was going to leave the room, shut the door, *and said nothing else.* Phillip, down in the cellar, thought that he *had* left, or he might not have taken the chance, killing Wills while his brother was still in the same small room.

"*But* — there was one thing essential to the plan: no one but Wills and my client could be in the cottage. And there it is. The brains behind Phillip belong to a woman who despised Wills because he never married *her*, and despised my client because he was a poor substitute.

"She carried the joke about Wills's beard along, making sure he would shave it as soon as he arrived at the cottage, probably nudging her husband to press Wills into it. She kept herself and her daughter out of the cottage by stopping to pick flowers. She gave Phillip her husband's keys so that he could prepare things in advance. In short, she did all the thinking, down to the filed bullets. Phillip did all the work, down to hiding the gun in the chair. That way, they only had to deceive *one* person, her daughter.

"But you made one mistake, Mrs. Sparrow; you tried to do too much with one murder. . . ."

The clock hands jerked, a click.

Gray smiled. "What's the matter, Mrs. Sparrow, don't you think I have proof? You hired a maid last Tuesday. She is a private detective, acting on my orders." He placed the gun on the table, fished in his pocket, pulled out a piece of metal, tossed it up and down in his hand. "She found this imbedded in a jar of cold cream, in your room. It is the criss-cross piece of metal from the pipe. What were you planning to do with it? Have Phillip solder it back? Or was it just a souvenir, to please your egotistical criminal mind."

A woman in a green coat ran out into the aisle, suddenly turned, and rushed for the exit doors. She didn't get far. Two police guards grabbed her arms, whirled her around, pinned an arm behind her back. Abbott vaulted over the rail, forgetting his bulk.

"Hold her!"

Gray dropped the piece of metal into an envelope and the gun into a pocket. He said: "Snap out of it, Sparrow. To hell with her, you never loved her. Wills's wife was your . . ."

Sparrow stood up, sighing. "I can't think straight. I — I want to thank you. . . ." He held out a quivering hand.

"I don't want thanks. I'm a lawyer. I want money. Five thousand, remember?"

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Sparrow dropped his hand.

"Can't you — I haven't a blank check."

Gray fumbled in his brief-case.

"I have — all filled out. Just sign."

He handed Sparrow a fountain pen. Sparrow scratched his name hurriedly, slid the check across the table.

"There —"

"Okay. That ends our — acquaintanceship. You can attend to the rigmarole of having yourself released. Don't worry about Phillip. It was self-defense."

He left the brief-case on the table, walked down the aisle, and out of the courtroom. It had been a hard day, and he was thirsty.

EDITORIAL EXCERPTS

Dear Leonard:

. . . Gray is a tough bird and I want you to keep him tough. But he shouldn't be too *tough. Too much of even a good thing boomerangs. Readers like the kind of toughness they* admire. *When a character gets so tough that readers begin to dislike him, you're treading dangerous ground. That's why I suggest that the last scene* [*in the original version*] *— slapping the daughter — be cut out. There's nothing wrong in a tough character hitting a woman, when the woman deserves it, or when she is the murderess; but in your story the daughter is innocent; further, Gray smacks her at the worst possible time — just after the girl has suffered an emotional shock at the exposure and arrest of her mother. In other words, Gray slugs her at the very moment the reader has genuine sympathy for her: that's poor timing for a boy-hits-girl scene, and may leave a bad taste in the reader's mouth.*

I'll end the story at the point where Gray makes Sparrow sign an already prepared blank check. This ends the story on the mercenary trait in Gray's character — which is tough and real enough, and for which most readers will probably have a sneaking sort of admiration . . .

[*Leonard objected to your Editor's cutting out the scene.*]

More about guts and toughness: we will not achieve mutual understanding until our definitions of terms approximate one another's. I'm still going to delete that last scene, even though you say you meant it as a pushing rather than a slapping or slugging. The cut is well advised purely as a cut, and I still feel that it is dangerous at this stage of the series (only the second story) to be too nonconformist in the character of Gray. Here's my big point: a character can be tough and have guts without resorting to physical violence — especially, I repeat, hitting a perfectly innocent girl at a psychologically bad moment. Think of it this way: it would be okay, say, in a pulp magazine. But EQMM rises above the very best of pulp standards.

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True, EQMM sometimes reprints pulp stories, even buys pulp-type originals. That's because EQMM deliberately explores every species and variety of the detective short story; but when EQMM uses pulp, it uses only the best pulp.

Let your guts in a character stem from inner *strength, not from obvious boy-hits-girl sensationalism. The toughness, the guts, the hardboiledism, should be deep, not superficial. Of course, I grant there are times when having a woman slugged is perfectly relevant to the plot of a story, and at those times let your main character hit and hit hard; but never at a time when you risk antagonizing your reader and losing his respect . . .*

Some time ago you asked me if it is always absolutely necessary to play fair with the reader. In my personal credo — YES. I realize that many writers — some of our most famous, in fact — do not always play fair, strictly fair, with their readers. But if I were you, purely for your own good, I'd do it the hard way and play absolutely fair to the letter.

By fairness-to-reader I mean simply this: that the reader can by logical deduction reach the correct solution using only the facts given by the author. *That is the Queen hallmark, as I think you'll agree; I wish it were the hallmark of the entire detective-story writing profession, but alas it's not. It should, however, be yours, and it can be if you're willing never — and I mean,* never — *to take the line of least resistance.*

Take "Close Shave," for example: it is not *fair to the reader. I think the reader can, by inference, reach the correct solution as to* how *the crime was committed. But the reader cannot arrive logically as to* who *committed the crime. Gray's solution was, strictly speaking, mere guesswork — until his agent found the criss-cross piece of metal in Mrs. Sparrow's cold cream jar. That piece of metal is* evidence; *it confirms a guess, but that's all it does and it doesn't do this conclusively (see below). And note: from the reader's standpoint, the evidence is* withheld — *not given to the reader as a fact until* after *Gray has exposed Mrs. Sparrow.*

All that Gray can really say is this: the crime is a very clever one; Phillip is very stupid; he *couldn't have conceived the crime — all he could do was be the instrument for someone else. Who? Gray says Mrs. Sparrow. Why Mrs. Sparrow? No deductive clue indicates her and her alone. It's just a guess. If you twisted the motive, it could just as easily have been the daughter who planned it and got Phillip to follow her instructions.*

True, the finding of the metal cross-piece is evidence. But here again, from a strict detective-story standpoint, it could be a frame. It still could have been the daughter, with the daughter planting the evidence in her mother's cold cream jar . . .

ELLERY QUEEN

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In our February 1946 issue we brought you Jack Moffitt's "The Necklace," a criminous sequel to Guy de Maupassant's classic short story of the same name. The idea, as we pointed out at the time, of one author writing an afterpiece to another author's story is not a new literary conception; however, the only sequels that came readily to your Editor's mind, both in and out of the detective-crime field, were either novels or novelettes; we could remember no one before Jack Moffitt who had followed up another writer's short story with a short story of his own.

Laurie York Erskine, creator of Renfrew of the Mounted, a character famous in magazines, books, radio, and movies, took exception to our editorial mnemonics, and proved his right to take exception by sending us a sequel-by-short-story that he himself had written. We won't say another word about it, but after you have finished reading "Tea for Two" we will quote further from Mr. Erskine's fascinating letter.

TEA FOR TWO

by LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

THE abrupt and untimely death of Alden Buxtree, falling close upon the triumphant success of his novel, THE STRANGEFLEET CASE, afforded a melancholy satisfaction to all who knew him. To his friends it provided the opportunity of recalling days when he had in no way merited the praise, prestige, and prosperity which success had brought him, while to his enemies it gave the privilege of reciting without danger of denial many anecdotes which proved the intimacy of their acquaintance with him. Among the few who spoke of his departure with regret was the beautiful but disquieting Mrs. Enderby.

"You see," she would say, "there was something about him . . ." And she would gaze into distance as if she saw, outlined on the remote wallpaper, the embodiment of that indescribable something. "I met him at the Tavernhams, you know, hardly a week before he died; but I could feel it — like little waves, you know — vibrations between us. He had genius. I know it. That's why I bought his collection of books — though I admit it didn't come up to what I'd expected. . . ." She would smile, as if with a secret knowledge of meanings inscrutable to others. ". . . After he died. It was so brief . . . our friendship, you know. On Thursday afternoon we met, and on the following Wednesday morning they found him dead."

That Alden Buxtree had come to tea with her at her "flat" on the afternoon preceding that fatal Wednesday morning was a detail which she never deemed it necessary to mention.

The rooms which Mrs. Enderby

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called her "flat" composed a small apartment overlooking the East River, which she said reminded her of the Thames. Buxtree was impressed by the flowery cosiness of the flat. He had travelled widely in England gathering material for THE STRANGE-FLEET CASE, but he had never seen anything so English. He said so.

"I knew you'd understand," she replied. "And now you must make yourself comfortable while I get you some tea. My maid is out today, and we can be quite alone." She retired into the small kitchen, leaving Buxtree to luxuriate in the reflection of how softly, yieldingly feminine she appeared in the lustrous pearl-grey gown in which she had draped her small, ripe figure; of how definitely she had made it plain that he was to regard this visit as essentially private, between themselves, and of how admirably she had ensured that privacy. He congratulated himself upon these harbingers of imminent romance.

Emerging from the kitchen with tea things, Florence Enderby disappointed him. As an approach to romantic intimacy, it was the simple habit of Alden Buxtree to talk about himself, but Mrs. Enderby wouldn't have it. She talked about tea, both as a beverage and as a social institution. She deplored the American cocktail and deprecated the failure of Americans to regard tea as a time of day instead of as an exhibition of silverware. One missed the cosiness, the informality — but there! Mr. Buxtree could understand. He had been so much in England. His books showed it. He loved it — that she knew . . . and, sugar?

"One," said Buxtree. He watched with pleasure the graceful movement of her small, shapely hand and the white, rounded forearm from which the silken sleeve fell back as she delved with a silver spoon in the bowl of granulated sugar.

"Loaf sugar," she remarked, "is an American custom which evades me."

"I'm glad you found my book captured something of the English atmosphere." Buxtree brought the conversation firmly back to first principles.

"It made me feel I was back," she smiled, "in a small village I knew in Cambridgeshire. How was it you knew the people so well?" Her hazel-green eyes smiled directly into his as she handed him the cup and saucer. "The cakes," she explained, "are something I make myself. Not those. Let us save those for later." She had an odd, girlish quality, he decided, that belied the deep sophistication of her glance — but bafflingly cool, tantalizingly reserved, and self-contained. Buxtree consoled himself with a piece of substantial, plain cake with carraway seeds in it. "But your book was cruel," she said.

"Cruel," Buxtree mouthed the word fondly. Like all authors, he was delighted to be considered cruel.

"You see," she said, "I think you're a very clever person, and I think you know a great deal more than even your lovely book betrayed; but the deadly logic with which you hounded

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poor Eva Tredgold down and had them hang her in the last chapter struck me as gorgeously ruthless."

"Life," the enchanted Buxtree reminded her, "is ruthless."

"I'm afraid I've never given that much thought," she said. "But you see, I *was* in Cambridgeshire at the time of that hideous Armitage case, so I know where you got your plot." She sparkled upon him like a mischievous schoolgirl. "Only poor Mr. Armitage," she pointed out, "went all alone to the gallows for poisoning wife, while the lady of his heart was acquitted of complicity in the crime without even her name being brought into it. That makes you just twice as ruthless as life, does it not?"

Buxtree smiled indulgently. "A novelist," he explained, "must be true to himself. I admit THE STRANGEFLEET CASE was based upon a very close study of the Armitage poisoning case, but I may say in confidence," — he assumed an authoritative air which in the past had done much to win him an enviable unpopularity — "that I had access to private information which was not introduced at the trial; and according to the evidence it provided, I had to find Eva Tredgold guilty, and to condemn her. I had no choice."

"But what of the poor woman in the original case — do try another bit of seedcake! — of course, it's perfectly obvious that she loved poor Mr. Armitage entirely too much; but after all, it was proved, wasn't it, that she had sailed — for America, wasn't it? — before the poison was actually administered to poor Mrs. Armitage?"

"But supposing she *hadn't?*" Buxtree leaned forward, cake in one hand, tea cup in the other. "Supposing it happened as I worked it out in the book? Supposing this Madame X, as they called her throughout the trial, had booked her passage for America and actually sailed *from Cherbourg* on a boat that stopped at Southampton? She leaves the boat, runs up to Cambridgeshire for that night-time visit with Mrs. Armitage, of which poor Armitage knew nothing, and then is back at Southampton to rejoin the ship. Armitage returns in the morning, as my book describes it, to find his wife dying; and because Madame X is never suspected, the authorities accept her elaborate plans for sailing, the passenger list from Cherbourg, and her appearance in America, as evidence of her having sailed *before* the poison was administered."

Mrs. Enderby appeared unimpressed.

"Ingenious, yes," she smiled. "But after all, she had been honorably dismissed from the case; they had even refused to bring her name into it. It seems so cruel to drag her out of retirement and pin the crime on her."

Buxtree permitted himself a superior smile. "You don't seriously believe," he said, "that she had nothing to do with the murder?"

"The courts believed it."

"The courts!" He spoke scornfully. "Supposing I were to tell you that I possess evidence which conclusively proves Madame X an accomplice."

"No!" Her eyes widened in charm-

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ing incredulity. "Not all that business of the boats! You did it beautifully, Mr. Buxtree. It was a triumph of imagination, but —"

"It wasn't!" he cried recklessly. "It was true! It actually happened!" Like all good novelists, Buxtree was prepared to lie to the last ditch in defense of his novel's verisimilitude. "I have traced that woman's movements, Mrs. Enderby, from the boat to the Armitages, and from Cambridgeshire to America. If ever the real Eva Tredgold is found, I have evidence that can bring her to justice, just as surely —"

"As your tea is cold as ice!" she cried gaily. "Let me take it!" Her hand snatched his cup with the graceful flight of a swallow. "Oh, it's all very delightful and mysterious," she exulted, rising with teacup in one hand and teapot in the other, "and I feel as if I'd been let in behind the scenes at a play! But how you can unearth secrets that the Scotland Yard men missed is beyond my poor little comprehension."

He laughed modestly. "We have our own methods," he said.

"But *how*?" she insisted. "Where could it all come from?"

Buxtree was wondering about that himself, but then, as she stood gazing at him with starry eyes, he had it.

"Mrs. Armitage," he said enigmatically.

"But she was dead."

"Not when Armitage found her," he reminded her. "And she told him of the woman's visit."

"She told him! But he'd never have —"

"He did!" Buxtree was inventing recklessly now. "The poor devil was as infatuated as that. He knew she had poisoned his wife — and he kept silent. He died for her."

She was gazing at him with thoughtful unbelief. "How could you *know* it?" she asked him reproachfully.

"He wrote it down," Buxtree maintained stoutly. "Scrawled it on the flyleaf of a book about English beetles. It came into my possession with others of his books and — er — papers. You see I bought up all his belongings I could. And I found a pearl."

"How lovely!" she cried. "You own it? You have it now?"

"Of course." He assumed an admirable vagueness. "It's just one of a lot of old books knocking about my study. I'd find it hard to lay hands on it, now." He laughed carelessly.

"Of course," she admitted. "But I *must* make you a fresh cup of tea!"

Again she retreated to the kitchen. Again there was talk of tea as a beverage, of tea as an institution. Again her pretty hands fluttered over the sugar bowl and he was persuaded to eat the very special cake which she had made for him. But the room was dim before she returned again to the subject of his novel and then, to his chagrin, she used it to dismiss him.

"You know," she exclaimed, "it has been such a treat having this look behind the scenes. We must meet again and talk ever so much longer. You can tell me so much about all these tangles that we make out of our

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wretched little lives. You will, won't you?"

It seemed that she had to dress, now, for a dinner party, and he must go. He went reluctantly, feeling a strange heaviness, and increasing uneasiness as he walked home.

It was not until he had removed his coat and flung himself upon the bed that the pain seized him; and it was not until he curled up despairingly in an excruciating foreknowledge of his doom that he realized his irremediable mistake.

He had met the Madame X of the Armitage poisoning case and had made the fatal error of having tea with her.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Mr. Erskine wrote "Tea for Two" in 1936, and it appeared in "Collier's" the same year. The story is based, as deep students of real-life murder have probably guessed, on the famous Armstrong affair. You will remember that an unusual nicety in nomenclature took place during the trial of Dr. Armstrong who eventually went to the gallows for the poisoning of his wife. Because the prosecution admitted the complete innocence of Armstrong's mistress — complete innocence, that is, of complicity in the crime — she was protected from public identification by being referred to as "Madame X."*

In the gay twenties (we are still quoting freely from Mr. Erskine's letter) Aldous Huxley frowned studiously on the delicate procedure of calling a murder-trial witness "Madame X"; Mr. Huxley's frown gave birth to a famous short story — his "The Gioconda Smile" (in the book, MORTAL COILS, *1922; first separate book-edition under the title,* THE GIOCONDA SMILE, *Chatto & Windus, 1938, No. 9 of the "Zodiac Books").*

"The Gioconda Smile" is a fictional treatment of the Armstrong cause célèbre in which Aldous Huxley demonstrated the truth that X marks the spot: Huxley made "Dr. Armstrong's" anonymous inamorata the real murderer, with "Armstrong" romantically taking the rap for his mysterious mistress.

While reading the Huxley version, Mr. Erskine got a notion: he wondered what would have happened to Mr. Huxley if (a) he met "Madame X," and (b) did not know her true identity, and (c) the lady known as "Madame X" really had been guilty. The result of Mr. Erskine's speculations is the story you have just read, and Mr. Erskine committed it to publication without revealing the source of his inspiration. He was curious to see if any student of criminology would combine the Armstrong case with Huxley's fictional treatment and deduce that Mr. Erskine had actually written a sequel to "The Gioconda Smile."

By the way: the name Alden Buxtree was contrived merely as a "sound" clue; it was obviously not meant to be a portrait of Aldous Huxley . . .

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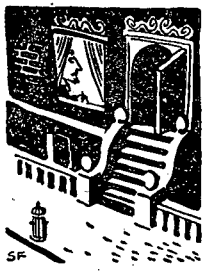

Where do the better-known fictional detectives live? Their creators have given us such apocryphal addresses as 110A Piccadilly, and Brockley Road, and 5A King's Bench Walk. The cognoscenti are aware that Lord Peter Wimsey locks his wine cellar under the aforementioned Piccadilly number; that Mr. J. G. Reeder keeps his umbrella and hangs his square derby in Brockley Road; and that Dr. Thorndyke conducts his interminable experiments in the dignified quiet of King's Bench Walk. But all this — let's face it — is "such stuff as dreams are made on" — a world of illusion and delusion.

Illusion or delusion, the detectives of fiction do have addresses and they do live in houses, and these houses are not wholly imaginary. Indeed, they actually exist and they bear likenesses to the homes we poor mortals inhabit. For instance, they have different colors — one of Lord Peter's is green, one of Mr. Reeder's is yellow, and one of Dr. Thorndyke's is blue. They also have stories — in fact, some of them are very tall houses: the Lord Peter Wimsey mansion we have in mind has no less than twelve floors — that is, stories. These dwellings are, of course, books, *and many of them are so structurally perfect that they will withstand forever the test of time, the wear of occupancy, and the termiting of critics. Many of them are show places — architectural masterpieces.*

Now it is a fact that while the great detectives of fiction do not like to live alone — Wimsey has his Bunter, Thorndyke his Polton, and didn't Mr. Reeder eventually marry Margaret Belman? — they do not as a general rule live with other detectives. True, there are some hotels and boarding houses in Detection Town where more than one detective has a suite or room in the same building. We recall, for example, an apartment house on Christie Street — it is called THE REGATTA *— and in it live Hercule Poirot, Parker Pyne, and Miss Marple. But most detectives not only have permanent homes of their own but they keep them to themselves. Thus, among houses of short stories, Lord Peter Wimsey has one domicile that is exclusively his:* VIEWS, *as it is familiarly known, the full name of the estate being* LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY; *Mr. Reeder has three different homes; and Dr. Thorndyke, a nabob among detectives, lives in no less than five.*

But detectives, even in fiction, are peculiarly restless souls. Often, like so many of us, they yearn for complete solitude — they want to get away from it all. So it is not surprising to learn that some fictional ferrets have slyly

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established secret hideaways for themselves; at some unknown address they maintain a story or two where no name appears on the door-plate and the telephone is "unlisted," strictly private.

Reggie Fortune is one of them. The moanin', sufferin', my-only-aunt Reggie owns as many as twelve houses; yet hidden away in the QUEEN'S BOOK OF THE RED CROSS *is a little one-room cottage quaintly named "The Thistle Down"; we revealed this sanctum sanctorum in our issue of May 1943. And for all his five other homes, even the austere Dr. Thorndyke has his unsuspected little nests; in* THE GREAT PORTRAIT MYSTERY *Dr. Thorndyke maintains two little snuggeries where he can spend quiet weekends "far from the madding crowd." One is "Percival Bland's Proxy," exposed in our issue of Spring 1942, and the other is "The Missing Mortgagee," which we hope to make public in the near future. And so gentle and patrician a detective as Max Carrados, who has three residences already well-known to his ardent admirers, can escape occasionally to an undercover retreat called "Violets" — "The Bunch of Violets" in* THE SPECIMEN CASE *— another clandestine hideaway brought to light in EQMM, issue of September 1943.*

Pursuing our Winchellian mood, we ask: What famousleuth who has two homes in Manhattan can sometimes be found in the penthouse of DETOURS*?*

Seriously: this detective is known to reside in only two books of short stories — JIM HANVEY, DETECTIVE *and* SCRAMBLED YEGGS. *But that fat, sentimental, fish-eyed, gold-toothpicking friend of all the crooks in crookdom, the great Jim Hanvey, also has a secret story to his credit. It is one of the ten assorted tales in Octavus Roy Cohen's book titled* DETOURS, *and as an "unknown" and previously undisclosed chronicle of Jim Hanvey, it is also a detective-story discovery of (like Jim himself) Brobdingnagian size.*

FREE AND EASY

by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

MR. CHARLES ELLIS looked like a prosperous book salesman. He fairly bounced into the room, wide-open, baby-blue eyes sparkling, manner alert and eager, friendliness fairly oozing from every pore of his rather-too-pudgy figure. He paused abruptly before the easy-chair, and his innocent eyes crinkled at the corners.

"Goodness gracious!" he exclaimed in a shrill, rather high-pitched voice. "Are you really Jim Hanvey?"

The enormous figure in the chair moved a trifle. Jim's colorless eyes

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met those of his visitor with mild amusement.

"That's what Ma always called me."

"Well, I'll be surprised!" Ellis effervesced. "You're not at all as I imagined. We certainly ought to be friends — we're both stout."

"I'm not stout," negatived Hanvey. "I'm fat."

Mr. Charles Ellis inspected his host with overt amusement. It was on his lips politely to deny Jim's self-accusation, but in deference to his regard for truth, he found that impossible.

Jim's figure overflowed the mammoth chair. It was enormous and well-nigh shapeless, a mass of human flesh upon which certain ill-fitting clothes had been hung ruthlessly. Hanvey was the personification of the immovable body, a living example of utter inertia. Only a slight movement of head and hands gave any indication of life about the man-mountain: the former was an unwieldy, rather bulbous growth which seemed to sprout directly from the shoulders. It was distinctive chiefly for its multitude of chins and the fishlike eyes which looked upon the world like two pieces of gray agate. The hands were playing idly with a powerful gold watch chain which spanned the ill-fitting vest and from which was suspended a gleaming gold weapon which the visitor, on close inspection, discovered was a patent toothpick. Slowly, Mr. Ellis nodded.

"So you are," he agreed: "terribly fat."

Nor was the contrast between the men confined solely to the difference between the healthily plump and the unconscionably fat. Charles Ellis was by way of being a sartorial symphony. His figure was encased in a tight-fitting tailor-made suit of creamy brown. He wore a brown-and-white silk shirt with collar to match. Hose and tie were of a deeper hue of brown, and the hat and gloves matched the tan of Mr. Ellis' cane. He appeared to Jim like an illustration of what the well-dressed man was sentenced to wear.

Mr. Ellis was nothing if not a personage. He bounced as he walked, radiating good cheer throughout the stuffy and rather ill-kept room. He seemed supremely sure of himself, and pleased with his sureness.

"I fancy you are rather surprised to see me, aren't you, Mr. Hanvey?"

"Well —" Jim's heavy voice seemed to fill the room. "I wouldn't exactly say not. Never having heard of you before —"

"Oh! That's all right — perfectly all right. You'll hear a great deal of me in the future. I might even say, Mr. Hanvey, that I am about to become a very important factor in your life."

"That's fine — fine."

Ellis extracted from a gold-plated case a single monogrammed cigarette. Then he extended the case to the detective, but the huge head moved in slow negation.

"Nope. Never could stand them things." Jim produced a big black

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projectile which he lighted with evident relish. "If you don't mind —"

As he exhaled the first cloud of rancid smoke, Charles Ellis seemed to shrink. He gazed wildly about the room, and his eyes came hopefully to rest on a window. Jim nodded amusedly.

"Open one, if you like. These here cigars don't add nothin' to my personal popularity."

Ellis returned from the window. He seated himself and came to the point.

"First of all, Mr. Hanvey, let me explain that I have come to see you professionally. My business involves the theft of twenty-five thousand dollars in cash."

Silence for a moment. Then Jim spoke: "That's a lot of cash, son."

"Isn't it? And I'm proud to inform you, Mr. Hanvey, that I'm the man who stole it."

Only an intimate friend of Hanvey's would have listened for — and heard — the metallic click caused by the sudden closing of the gold toothpick. Outwardly the portly detective gave no indication of surprise or even interest. His fishy eyes took on a slightly more glassy hue; his pursy lips contracted somewhat; he continued to stare at the dapper young man through orbs which apparently saw nothing.

Ellis, watching closely, appeared disappointed. "Goodness gracious! Mr. Hanvey — doesn't that even interest you?"

Jim's head moved slowly. "Sure it does, Charles — sure it does."

"I figured it would." It was patent that Mr. Ellis was disappointed by Jim's matter-of-factness. "That's a great deal of money for one young man by himself to steal, isn't it?" he inquired proudly.

"Mm-hmm! Sort of. Of course lots of younger men have stole more — but then, I judge you ain't had much experience, have you?"

"No," answered Mr. Ellis with obvious regret. "Not much. Of course, if certain conditions had not unexpectedly arisen, I'd have stolen more."

"That's tough," sympathized Jim. "Feller gets a scheme workin' good, an' then somebody has to step in an' crab things."

"And now — I suppose you're terribly curious about why I've come to see you."

"Some."

"Well, I've come for this: I've come to tell you all about how I stole the money — and to request your assistance."

Ellis leaned forward in search of some indication of the detective's surprise. But his theatrically inclined soul was disappointed. Hanvey took his announcement with exasperating calm.

"Well," said he, "it might be arranged."

"I'm quite sure it might." A hint of irritation at Jim's impassivity had crept into the tones of Charles Ellis. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Hanvey, the object of my visit is to do you a favor. If you're interested?"

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"Sure, I'm interested, son. I kind of always have been interested in stolen money."

Despite his jauntiness, it was plain that some of Ellis' cocksureness had departed. He was just as alert but less obviously pleased with himself.

"As you have probably gathered from my card, Hanvey, I am employed by the State Home Building and Loan Association in the capacity of bookkeeper. And since it is from that firm I have stolen the money, you would naturally be called into the case. Is that not so?"

"Uh-huh."

"That is why I claim to be doing you a favor. Now" — eying him critically — "you do not impress me as being a man who is overly fond of sustained effort."

"You said it, son."

"And had I not come to you, the minute the shortage was discovered, you would be forced to wade through a mass of exasperating detail before you discovered my guilt — provided you ever did. What I propose is to tell you everything: how much I've taken, how I've taken it, in just what condition the books may be found — all of which will save you endless work and worry and probably pave the way for a little deal between us." Ellis leaned forward earnestly, pink little hands on Jim's chair. "Am I not thoughtful?"

"You sure are, Charles; you sure are."

"I suppose the best thing I can do is to begin at the beginning, isn't it?"

"Yep. That seems to be about as good a place as any."

"In the first place, Hanvey, I don't wish you to harbor any erroneous impressions. I believe it is more or less common for bookkeepers to consider themselves downtrodden and to abstract small sums of money in the mistaken belief that the world owes them a better living than it has given.

"I want you to understand that such is not the case with me. The world — and more particularly my company — has paid me in salary every cent it owes me, every cent that I've earned. My job is fairly simple, not too arduous, and one that I like. To be frank, I rather adore columns of figures. So you see when I stole, I did so without kidding myself in the slightest degree. There are, briefly, absolutely no extenuating circumstances."

Ellis paused. Jim's vitreous eyes opened wide. Then, with maddening slowness, the lids curtained them, held shut for two or three seconds — and as slowly uncurtained. Ellis fancied that Jim had heard nothing, seen nothing. Then came the uncomfortable sensation that Hanvey had heard more than he acknowledged, seen more than he cared to disclose.

"I've been with the State Home for six years," continued Ellis. "I am a trusted employee, which means that I have for some time had every opportunity for crookedness. And for years I speculated upon how I should steal from the company in case I ever desired to do so.

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"You know," — and he dropped a confidential hand on Jim's shoulder, — "it's a pet theory of mine that there isn't a system of accounting so sound that it cannot be beaten by a clever man, and I rather flatter myself that I am clever, I hope, though" — in quick apology — "that you won't get the idea I'm an egotist."

"Naw," said Jim dryly. "Not a chance."

"As I was saying, from about the end of my first year with the State Home, I took an academic interest in evolving a method for beating their elaborate audit system. Two years ago I solved it — solved it beautifully. And then when opportunity for a clean-up presented itself —" He shrugged: "You know how it is."

"Sure, I know."

"And the real beauty about what I've done, Hanvey," continued Ellis pridefully, "is that I'm safe — absolutely and utterly safe. Not only am I safe, but an innocent man is in danger. A company audit will clear me and put Kenneth F. Harrison in jail."

"Who's he?"

"Cashier for the State Home." Ellis' face broke into a cherubic smile. "If you only knew Mr. Harrison, Hanvey, you'd appreciate the humor of the situation. That man was born honest. He's so honest that sometimes I get absolutely disgusted with him."

"And you've framed him, eh?"

"I have. As a matter of fact, I haven't overlooked a detail. And you'll excuse me if I continue to smile at the prospect of Mr. Harrison's expression when he is arrested for this theft which I have committed. That man is so innately innocent of all evil, Hanvey, that he'll hang himself. I really couldn't have been more clever in choosing a — a — what is it you detectives call them, a come-on?"

"That'll do as well as anything. Now, admitting to me that you stole this money and that you framed Harrison, what's to prevent me from putting you in stir?"

Ellis seemed hurt. "Goodness gracious, Hanvey, that's what I'm trying to make clear to you; you seem terribly obtuse. Can't you understand that if you arrest me, you'll merely make yourself ridiculous?"

"Wouldn't be the first time. But why?"

"Simply this: you couldn't convict me in a thousand years. I've been quite careful about that."

"This confession of yours?" Jim's eyes blinked with intolerable slowness.

Charles snapped his pink fingers disdainfully. "Worth nothing. You'll claim that I confessed, and I'll deny it. If you arrest me you'll find not a scintilla of evidence upon which to convict me. On the other hand, you'll find enough evidence against Kenneth F. Harrison to keep him in jail until the millennium. Knowing, however, that Harrison has been framed, you won't touch him. So where are you?"

"Nowhere," grunted Jim.

"Precisely. I'm delighted to find

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you so amenable to reason and so receptive to logic."

"Them's harsh words, son. How much did you swipe?"

"Twenty-five thousand." There was genuine pride in the announcement.

"Gosh — that's what I'd call much cash."

"Isn't it? Which," said Ellis, growing suddenly serious, "brings me down to the real reason of this visit. You see, Hanvey, I invested that twenty-five thousand in a gilt-edged scheme. Contrary to rule, that scheme is panning even better than I thought. In thirty days I shall be in a position to return to the State Home the money I stole, plus eight per cent interest, and still have for myself one hundred thousand dollars clear profit!"

Jim raised his tremendous head and surveyed the dapper visitor with renewed interest. "You don't say!"

"I do say. I was very careful about this investment. I knew it must not fail, because I realize, of course, that opportunity of this sort comes only once in a lifetime."

"Yep. And only to real lucky guys, at that."

"Now my proposition is this: Give me thirty days' time and the Company's promise of immunity, and I'll return the twenty-five thousand dollars with interest."

"Suppose you don't?"

"Then the Company is no worse off than it is now. But I will — if I'm promised immunity."

"And if we don't promise immunity?"

"Then," grinned Ellis, "I'll let you fire when ready. You'll of course arrest me. Mr. Harrison, being innocent, will be shocked and surprised to find himself involved. You won't be able to convict me — and when I come through the trial, I'll take my little hundred and twenty-five thousand and live happily ever after. Then you'll have the option of proceeding against an innocent man and sending him to jail, or else dropping the whole affair. In either event the Company will sustain a twenty-five-thousand-dollar loss. Or, let us presume for the sake of argument, that you do convict me. With all the evidence pointing to another man, it is a certainty that my sentence will be extremely light. I'd take my conviction gladly, serve my time, and when I came out, very cheerfully exist for the rest of my days on stolen money and its accrual: something more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. There's the proposition from every angle, Hanvey. What do you choose?"

Jim slumped deeper into his chair. At length his voice came: "Sounds to me, son, like we'll give you the promise you want."

"Fine! That's great."

The detective raised a fat and admonitory finger. "Of course I can't say for certain. I've got to talk to the Company officers. But I reckon they'll be reasonable provided it means the saving of that much cash: folks are thataway sometimes." He hitched

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himself forward. "Ain't got no objections to telling me how you beat the game, have you?"

"Delighted, Hanvey." The young man's tone was faintly patronizing. "I'm really desirous of saving you trouble —"

"Gosh! You're the most thoughtful crook I've ever met."

"I always think of others —"

Hanvey chuckled. "Especially Kenneth Harrison, eh?"

Ellis threw back his head and laughed. "Especially old Harry. And now as to the manner in which I stole this money — and I do hope you'll follow closely, as it is rather an elaborate scheme."

"All right, son. Shoot."

"In the first place," explained Ellis, "we do a much larger business than people believe. While we're not the largest building-and-loan association in the city, we are one of the soundest: a small, compact, efficient organization; every man — including myself — competent and trustworthy."

"Certainly helps a company to have nothing but honest employees."

"It does" — with a faint twinkle — "and it often helps the employees — to help themselves. At any rate, we carry an enormous number of accounts: persons who have borrowed from us to finance homebuilding. These loans are returnable to us in monthly installments; some run into the hundreds. I should say the average is about sixty dollars. And a large percentage of this money is paid in cash.

"I hadn't been working for the State Home more than a year or so when I became interested in the large amount of cash I was handling."

"But," interrupted Jim, "I thought you said you were the bookkeeper."

"I am. In our organization, however, I rank next to old Harry — that's Harrison. And every day he takes a couple of hours off for lunch. While he's out, I stay in his cage; see?"

"Uh-huh! Go ahead."

"I've always been something of a student — rather interested in obtaining things easily, particularly money. And I've had a theory that there isn't a financial system that can't be beaten, provided one will take sufficient pains in planning."

"There's lots of others who've had that idea, son. Most of 'em are wearing loud suits which don't get pressed very often."

Ellis shrugged. "Those who have been crude enough to be caught. You know nothing of the men who haven't been.

"I'm one of the latter class. From the moment I determined to evolve a scheme to beat their check-up at the office, it became part of my plan to establish an alibi. At that time, I didn't plan to put my scheme to the test. The idea of stealing came later."

"It most usually does," commented Hanvey.

"On the face of it, our system is impossible to beat." Ellis was talking earnestly now, a man launched upon his hobby before an interested audience. "Take yourself for example, Hanvey. Let us suppose that you are

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a client of ours. It is up to you to pay us fifty dollars a month. Your payment is due, we'll fancy, on the twelfth.

"On the morning of the twelfth I make out from my books a statement of the various payments which are due on that date. This I give to the cashier. As each person whose payment is due on that day comes in and pays, old Harry checks the payment off on that list. At the close of business the list is okayed by him and placed on the president's desk. That's item Number One.

"Item Two is this: You come in at eleven o'clock, we'll say, and pay your fifty dollars. Mr. Harrison immediately writes a receipt in our regular receipt book — and there comes the part of our system which was hardest to beat. That book, Hanvey, is arranged in triplicate. Your receipt is written on a page composed of twenty printed receipts. These are divided by perforations, so that when old Harry writes the receipt for your fifty dollars, he tears it out and hands it to you. You are protected absolutely by his signature on your receipt.

"Immediately beneath the page on which he writes that receipt is another page of perforated receipts, the exact duplicate of the first page. Your receipt is duplicated on another slip immediately below, and this slip is torn out and turned over to me, as bookkeeper. With it comes the cash, it being part of my duties to make the bank deposits.

"So much for that. You have your receipt for fifty dollars; I have an exact duplicate of that receipt. But beneath that second page is a third page, and it is there that the real difficulty presented itself; for that third page, Hanvey, is not composed of twenty perforated slips; that page is the permanent record. In other words, every receipt written for a customer is not only duplicated for the bookkeeper, but it is carboned on the permanent, numbered, non-detachable page so that when eventually the volume is exhausted, it will contain just one third the original number of pages and then becomes part of the permanent files. As you can see, there is obviously not a chance to beat the system, is there?"

Jim shook his head slowly from side to side. His fat lips pursed to whistle, and heavy spatulate fingers fumbled aimlessly with the gold toothpick.

"Congratulations. A brain which could figure a way around that system would be plumb wasted on an ordinary bookkeeper."

"You said it, Hanvey; I see we're men of the same kidney. And remember, I've not only beaten that game, but at the same time I've planted the evidence so that when the storm breaks, they'll have poor Kenneth Harrison dead to rights."

"Sort of tough on Harrison, ain't it?" Hanvey offered.

"Shuh! He's honest — and dumb."

"Lots of honest men are." Jim's forehead creased into a frown. "You don't object to answering me a few questions about this shakedown of

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yours, do you, Charles?"

"Service is my middle name."

"Good. Now suppose you tell me first why you came to me. — Oh, I know all about the immunity stuff. But it seems that if you've done as well as you say, there ain't any way of catching you."

Ellis' face grew serious. "Yes — there's one way — not of catching me, but of discovering the shortage. And that's a thorough audit. That audit has just started unexpectedly. It will disclose a discrepancy in the accounts, will develop a list of cash payments which should have been made and which apparently have not been made. The persons who should have made these payments — and actually did make them — will be called upon, and they will show their receipts, signed by old Harry himself. But even then there'll be no book in the office, and no record of that money ever having been received."

"How did you manage that?"

"Guess."

"Can't. I'm awful dumb."

Ellis appeared pleased. "Duplicate book," he said, "the receipt book I have told you about is specially made for us at Kincaid & Garron's. The serial numbers are all stamped in triplicate: one on each perforated, detachable receipt, one on the permanent record page. Some time ago I merely ordered a new receipt book; but" — and he paused theatrically — "I was careful to see that the serial numbers were duplications of the book then in use."

"Hmm. Clever!"

"Oh, I'm clever all right, Hanvey: if I do say it as one who shouldn't."

"And how did you work the duplicate book?" asked Hanvey.

"Cinch. There were dozens of times during the day when old Harry would leave his cage. At those times it was my job to relieve him. On the first trip I'd take in the duplicate book and hide the original one. With the payment of each amount by a cash client, old Harry would write out the receipt, hand it to the customer, give me the duplicate and the cash, make his permanent record on my own private book, and — in order to hang himself higher — check off on the daily list the receipt of payment. This list of payments received went in daily to the chief over Mr. Harrison's signature."

"And when you relieved him at lunch time?"

"Always made the substitution of the real book for the duplicate one, so that all money received by me is entered properly in the proper book."

"And when, after making his entries in the duplicate receipt book, Harrison would turn receipt and money over to you?"

"I'd tear up the receipt and pocket the cash. My books tally with the permanent record to a hair. And when an audit discloses the discrepancy, I'll be a mile in the clear. So far as my books show, I've scrupulously entered up and deposited every cent of cash received. This, of course, will not tally with the daily reports, but does

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agree with old Harry's signed receipts in the permanent record. I shall, of course, innocently point to that fact and merely claim that I never received either the perforated slips or the cash to cover them. The discrepancy can be fastened on him and nobody else.

"All in all, however, the books of the Company are now in this condition: For the period of my operations our customers hold receipts for about one hundred thousand dollars and our books show payment by them, during that time, of only seventy-five thousand dollars. They also show that old Harry has been the thief. Did you ever hear of a more perfect scheme?"

"It does sound pretty fair."

"Goodness gracious, Hanvey — how could it be better?"

"Don't ask me that, son. I'm nothing but an honest man. I ain't supposed to have the brain of a crook."

"It's sound, Hanvey. I can assure you of that. There's no need wasting time checking me up — although I suppose you'll do that, as a matter of course."

"No-o. I'm willing to take your word for it."

"That's fine." Again Ellis became serious. "I want you to put my proposition before the president and board of directors. I'm quite sure they'll listen to reason. In thirty days they'll get back their money with interest — provided they promise me immunity. If they won't — they can do as they please. Arrest and trial will suit me to a T, because they couldn't convict me to save their lives. Once I'm tried and acquitted, I can give them the merry ha-ha. I wouldn't mind it particularly if they convicted me — but they can't. If they insist on having a goat, I've obligingly groomed old Harry for the rôle." He grinned. "Just to see that old psalm-singer's face when they land on him — if they do! Although I don't know that he'd be any more shocked than he will be to discover that his trusted Charles Ellis has stooped to thievery. Honesty is Mr. Harrison's most pernicious habit."

Silence fell between them, silence interrupted only by the ticking of the cheap alarm clock on the mantel and the clang of a street car below. Jim's voice came slowly:

"I don't hardly reckon you'll tell me what you've done with this money, will you?"

"No — certainly not. I'm glad to oblige you within reason, but that wouldn't be sensible, would it?"

"No-o, I don't hardly think it would."

"Fine! We agree again. You're a delightful person to do business with."

"Thanks, son. You ain't no slouch yourself. In fact, I might say that you impress me as being one of the most promising crooks I've met up with."

Ellis flushed under the compliment. "Praise from Sir Hubert is praise indeed."

The pink-cheeked visitor arose and extended his hand. Jim's huge, clammy paw closed about it. "I'll be trotting

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along," said Ellis. "You go ahead and break the sad news to the officials of the Company. But if old Harry is there, be sure to have a hearse handy — he's liable to cash in."

"I'll do my best, son."

For a long time after the door had closed behind Ellis the jellyfish figure of the detective remained motionless in the easy-chair.

Eventually he hoisted himself from his chair, gave a tentative pat at his ill-fitting, shapeless garments, placed upon his head a felt hat at least one size too small and sallied forth. A half-hour later he paused before the portals of the State Home Building and Loan Association.

It was a small structure, but impressive, with a white marble front and dignified Ionic columns. He threaded his way through the traffic and waddled into the building. At his entrance a figure in a striped shirt raised his head and grinned recognition.

Jim's eyes focused first upon the cage marked "Cashier." Instantly he recognized Kenneth F. Harrison — old Harry.

Harrison was a man with the word "probity" delineated in every severe line of a preternaturally grave countenance. He was a tall man with a spare, almost gaunt figure, unusually long legs, and arms and hands of amazing gracefulness. He had a lean, rather cadaverous face, and deep-set black eyes which stared forth from beneath bushy brows. Jim instantly visioned him in severe frock coat and silk hat: Sunday — church — charity — puritanism — implacable hardness — rigid ethical code.

Hanvey sought the president, and a few minutes later he was closeted with that very commonplace gentleman. For several minutes they talked in low tones; then the very ordinary gentleman became most extraordinarily excited. He seized the telephone and did some frantic conversing. Within the hour Jim found himself facing the board of directors as well as the president.

The session was lengthy and stormy. At its conclusion Charles Ellis was summoned. He stepped jauntily across the threshold and smiled upon the assemblage in superior fashion. It was plain that he looked down upon them: men of a stamp, fettered by ethics and the tenets of honesty. He smiled cheerfully through the barrage of opprobrium hurled upon him.

Hanvey could not but admire the easy self-possession of the young bookkeeper. Very much of a *poseur*, Ellis yet posed gracefully, his innate dramatic sense lending him an air of impregnable superiority.

It was Jim who eventually directed the conversation to matters of more pressing moment. "If that twenty-five thousand dollars is returned within thirty days, you will be granted immunity, Ellis. But, mind you, thirty days is the absolute limit."

Ellis nodded. "Fine. I thought these gentlemen would see a light when their pocketbooks were threatened." He glanced rather supercil-

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iously at the circle of horrified faces. "I suppose, of course, that my position is vacant."

Jim Hanvey shook his head slowly. "No, son — not exactly. We discussed that: reckon you won't pull nothing during the next month and we'd a heap prefer to know just where you are."

"Suits me," announced the young man.

"And," interjected the president, "we hope that during this thirty days you will not continue to pursue your iniquitous course."

"Certainly not," said Charles Ellis. Then he made a truly magnificent gesture. "You have my word of honor."

And the amazed silence which ensued was punctured by the unrestrained, deep-throated laughter of Jim Hanvey.

During the next two days Hanvey was constantly about the office of the State Home, shoulder to shoulder with the auditor. Charles Ellis watched them with tolerant amusement. Then, quite suddenly, Jim Hanvey left town.

At first Jim's absence from the office caused the jaunty bookkeeper some apprehension. It amazed him to discover how thoroughly he had come to expect the sight of Jim's ungainly figure; it seemed that with Hanvey nosing into that portion of his plan which he knew was absolutely sound, he was safe.

But with Hanvey absent, he was not as tranquil in spirit as he would have liked. Hanvey was a constant source of surprise. Before visiting the big man, Ellis had familiarized himself with Jim's reputation, knew him to be one of the finest investigators in the country. Jim's personality had been a shock; Hanvey seemed so heavy and indifferent and lethargic that Ellis — keen and alert of mind — knew there must be danger lurking beneath the flabby exterior.

However, when for the seven days which followed, Jim did not again put in appearance, Charles Ellis permitted his spirits to rise. After all, he figured, his trifling larceny of twenty-five thousand dollars was not the only case in which Hanvey was, at the moment, interested. Chances were that Hanvey had effected the agreement of immunity and forgotten the matter entirely — filed it away in his brain for future reference in the event that Ellis did not make good his pledge of reimbursement at the end of thirty days.

The more Ellis speculated upon this possibility, the more certain he became that his conclusion was correct. He realized that he was but small fry in the career of a professional sleuth; what seemed big and vital to him could be of only slight interest to a man of Jim's experience.

After all, he had builded well and, according to his unmoral lights, was entitled to the fruits of his enterprise. His investment had been soundly made and seemed certain of returning fourfold dividends. No one would be the loser; the firm from which he borrowed the money was destined to

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receive it back with eight per cent. interest; he himself would be able to retire and live in modest comfort on his income. Charles Ellis whistled as he went about his work, apparently oblivious to the disapproval in the deep-set eyes of Kenneth Harrison, the cashier.

But the gay whistling ceased abruptly as the phone rang and he was summoned. From the other end came the hesitant, drawling, lazy voice of Jim Hanvey. Jim, it seemed, had returned to town and was desirous of chatting awhile that evening with Mr. Ellis. Did Charles have an engagement? Charles did, but he volunteered to break it. And for the balance of the day he went about his work in a rather preoccupied manner — not that he was afraid of Hanvey, but he could not forget that he had transgressed the law which Jim Hanvey represented.

Promptly at eight o'clock that night Jim was admitted to Ellis' little one-room-and-bath apartment on the second floor of a modest boarding-house. The combined bed-and-living-room was furnished as one might have expected: gaudily, almost effeminately. Ellis rose to greet the ponderous visitor, making a visible effort to conceal his apprehension.

Jim seated himself, stared at Ellis through fishlike eyes, lighted one of his atrocious cigars, fumbled with the golden toothpick and drawled a compliment.

"Son," he murmured, "you sure are good."

Ellis was wary. "Yes?"

"You sure are. I'll hand it to you."

"Thanks. But I'm afraid I don't quite savvy what you're driving at."

"No?" Jim appeared surprised. "But of course you wouldn't. Y'see, I been out of town for a week or so. Missed me?"

"Not particularly."

"Aw, Charles. You ain't bein' honest. You know you must have missed me some."

"Good gracious, Hanvey — what has that got to do with it?"

Jim shrugged his massive shoulders. "Just like to know when folks miss me." An almost human gleam lighted briefly his apparently sightless eyes. "Guess where I been?"

"Where?"

"Ardmore, Oklahoma."

If Hanvey saw the start of amazement which caused Charles Ellis' pudgy figure to stiffen suddenly, he gave no outward indication of the fact. Nor did he appear to have noticed the audible indrawing of breath, or the pallor which appeared instantly on the cheeks of the bookkeeper — that or the deep flush which followed.

Silence fell between them. Hanvey made his announcement and apparently lost all interest in the conversation. Ellis determined that he would not speak first; he feared to betray himself, but the silence became unbearable, and quite of their own volition, his lips repeated the name: "Ardmore?"

Jim nodded heavily. "Uh-huh."

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Snappy little town."

Charles' mind was racing. He knew he had nothing to fear, but —

"What did you find in Ardmore?"

Jim looked down affectionately at his gold toothpick.

"A heap," he answered slowly. "An' none of it makes me think any the less of you, son. You sure are clever."

"Why?" Ellis' throat was dry.

"Well," said Jim, "I was a little leery about this investment you made. You know when bookkeepers borrow money from their employers, they usually turn out to be rotten business men — cash generally goes flooie. I was afraid of that, so I hiked out to Oklahoma to get the low-down on what you'd done."

"How — how did you know I'd invested that money in Ardmore?"

"Oh, gosh! That wasn't so hard. I work for a pretty big organization — got a lot of men — and besides, you done a lot of business from this town. I reckon you want to know what I found in Ardmore, don't you — just so you'll be sure I ain't putting nothing over on you?"

"Yes — tell me."

Jim spoke with exasperating slowness, lids blinking maddeningly.

"In some way you got wise that one of the big oil companies was going to start extensive drilling operations near Ardmore. You knew that things have been pretty dead there recently — barring wildcatters; and you realized that once the big fellers commenced boring, there'd be a boom in the price of oil-land royalties. So all you done was to buy out twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of royalties at an average price of about eight dollars an acre. Then when the drilling started, you made arrangements to sell for a flat cash profit of four hundred per cent. Am I close?"

"I'm not saying you're not."

"Good. Thought maybe I'd bungled somewhere. I'm an awful sap sometimes. But *you* ain't, son; b'lieve me, *you* ain't. When I first learned you was investing in the oil country, I got scared. Another sucker, I tells myself, trying to make a million in oil. Sure was a relief to find that you was a genuine wise guy — grabbing your little rake-off from the real suckerinos.

"Yep — you sure ain't slipped nowhere. You plunged into a sucker game, but you lined up with the we-boys. You knew that the minute drilling started on a big scale, the come-ons would make a rush to grab royalties and leases on the chance that oil would be struck. You're fixing to pocket your profit from the leases and let 'em pray that oil shows up. Got to hand it to you for not holding onto them leases in the hope oil would really be struck. You're a nifty business man, Charles. Seems like you got equal brains — honest or crooked. It's a gift."

As Jim talked, Ellis' face cleared a trifle. There was no doubting the genial friendliness of Jim's manner, nor the sincerity of his tribute. After all, Ellis could not but take his statements at face value. He knew that he

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had been extremely keen in his manner of investing the stolen money. No fool, he, to gamble for a million. He was modestly content with the hundred thousand profit, and he appreciated Jim's compliment.

"Thanks, Hanvey. I'm glad to hear from a man of your experience and judgment that I am worthy to possess modest wealth."

"You sure are, Charles. You sure got a barrel of discernment and a real long head." He hoisted himself from his chair. "Guess I'll be trotting along. There's a swell movie down to the Vaudette I want to look in at; ain't seen it, have you?"

"Yes — I saw it."

"Gosh! I'm sorry. Thought maybe you'd go with me."

Ellis shook his head. From the doorway Jim flung a last bit of advice. "You ain't goin' to run beyond them thirty days, are you?"

"No."

"That's good. You gave your word to the Company you'd hand 'em their cash by then. I'd hate to see you go back on that."

"You can trust me implicitly," promised Charles Ellis.

As Jim's elephantine tread echoed on the uncarpeted stairway, Ellis sank slowly into the chair which Jim had occupied.

Despite Jim's friendly manner, the bookkeeper was more than a little disturbed. He had not fancied that it would be so easy for a person to discover the field of his activities; to say the least, it presented an unforeseen obstacle which must be surmounted. He smoked thoughtfully; there was no smile on the chubby face. Eventually he turned to the telephone and called a number. There ensued a brief, rather curt conversation. Five minutes later Ellis left the boarding-house.

He rented a shiny new flivver from a drive-it-yourself company and headed toward the country. He passed through a pretty suburb and came at length to a broad concrete road which wound leisurely across a wooded valley. The moon — nearly full — bathed the countryside in silver effulgence, but Charles Ellis had no eyes for the quiet grandeur of the scene. He drove with less than his usual conservatism, eyes riveted on the ribbon of road which wound swiftly beneath his wheels.

He came to a fork in the road, and left the concrete highway to turn right on the more lightly traveled gravel surfacing. He drove slowly for perhaps half a mile, then veered abruptly from the road and parked in a grove of live oaks.

He switched out his lights and strove to accustom his eyes to the gloom. Much of the cheeriness had departed from his manner; one might have said that he was more than a trifle worried.

At length there appeared on the road another pair of headlights. Nearing the grove, the car slowed down, and above the soft purr of the motor came a low whistle, thrice repeated. Instantly Ellis gave answer. Then

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the newcomer swung his car into the grove and parked it beside the flivver. He extinguished his lights, and the men shook hands.

"Well," demanded the man who had just arrived, "what's the trouble?"

Ellis' answer was laconic. "Plenty."

His eyes now were more used to the gloom, and in the half-light which filtered through the interlaced branches of the oaks, he inspected the face of the newcomer.

It was a long face, somewhat mournful in appearance — mournful rather than hard, as though its owner bemoaned the iniquities of others. Beneath the face was an elongated frame; the demeanor was one of excessive nervousness, and Charles Ellis was not so entirely divorced from his irrepressible sense of humor that he could repress a chuckle.

"Kenneth F. Harrison," he grinned, "the arch-plotter of the moonlight grove."

The voice of the other came sibilantly — and fearfully. "Hush, man! Don't call my name so loudly."

"Nothing to fear, old Harry. The trees have no ears."

"I don't know whether they have or not," was the nervous response of the cashier for the State Home Building and Loan Association. "I wish I'd never got into this mess."

"You do? Goodness gracious, Harry — you're sorry when, so far as you know, everything has run smooth as butter. I'm surprised at you."

"I'm not used to crookedness."

"We live and learn."

"Besides," snapped Harrison, "I'm afraid I put myself too much in your power. I was a fool to let you plant all that evidence against me."

"Oh, shoot! Haven't I convinced them that you had nothing to do with it? It was my ace of trumps."

"I'm not a card player," snapped Harrison somewhat peevishly.

"Hmm! It's a great thing — card playing. Especially poker — teaches a chap to know what the other fellow is thinking. Particularly what he thinks you are thinking! That's why I'm worried."

"Worried? You?"

"Yes. I'm human, you know. And I've just had a rather disquieting interview with Jim Hanvey."

"Oh!" Silence, and then, rather whiningly, "I've been afraid of that man from the first. He's a famous detective —"

"He's a fat, overfed fool — well, maybe not entirely a fool, but almost. He's lucky. And he's got good men working under him — big organization. Personally, he hasn't sense enough to come in out of the rain."

"But this interview? I thought he'd been out of town?"

"He had been. He went to Ardmore."

Charles Ellis contemplated with no little satisfaction the dynamite effect of his announcement. The tall, loose-jointed figure of the cashier seemed to buckle; a startled light leaped into his eyes.

"Ardmore?"

"You said it." It was the dapper

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Ellis who was dominating the scene. "And he's discovered the details of our investment scheme."

"My God!" wailed Harrison. "We're ruined!"

"Pshaw! We're as right as we ever were — merely have to be more careful."

"But Hanvey is a great detective —"

"Great, my grandmother! Haven't I pulled the wool over his eyes? Could I have done that with a great detective? You make me sick, Harry; you're a natural-born welsher."

"If he found out about our scheme —"

"Well" — testily — "what if he did? It will involve matters a trifle — that's all. I hope to goodness gracious you won't lose your nerve now: you never had much to start with."

"What are we going to do?"

"That's just what I want to discuss with you. Hanvey has learned, of course, that I have been operating under a company name. He must also know the name of the people we have been dickering with in Ardmore — the birds who are going to buy our leases. He's undoubtedly got some of his operatives watching them. Also, being head of the detective force of the Bankers' Protective, he unquestionably will know the minute the Ardmore gang certifies a check to my order. All we have to do is to circumvent that."

"All? *All?* Oh, Charles — isn't that *enough?*"

"Goodness gracious, no! The deal is about ready to go through. To-night I'm going over to Valley View and telephone Hastings in Ardmore. His crowd is more anxious to buy than we are to sell. I'll explain to him that for reasons of my own this deal has to be closed on the Q. T. and for cash. He'll have to come here with one hundred and twenty-odd thousand dollars in legal tender. He'll be met by you —"

"But I can't allow myself to get mixed up in this."

"You're not going to be mixed up in it. I will describe you to him without mentioning your name. You'll have identification credentials from me and also the conveyance of my leases. He'll unquestionably bring his lawyer; as soon as they satisfy themselves of the legality of the conveyance, they'll turn over the cash to you. You will put it in your safety-deposit box at the Fourth National until we get a chance to move it. And that's all."

"But suppose Hanvey should discover —"

"He won't discover anything. He doesn't suspect you. Goodness knows, nobody could suspect you of being anything but honest. Besides, if there *is* a chance, you've got to run it."

"And if Hastings won't agree to your plan?"

"He'll agree, all right. Remember, he thinks the deal is a bonanza for him. The reason we're doing all this is because Jim Hanvey is going to be watching me like a hawk; his idea will be to grab the entire hundred and

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twenty-some thousand dollars — nearly thirty, I believe — the minute it reaches town."

"Can't you buy Hanvey?"

"Pff! All men aren't cheap."

They separated, Kenneth F. Harrison murmuring apprehensively as he drove off. Charles Ellis watched his departure in disgust: he despised weakness, and old Harry was weak all the way through. "Poor fish!" soliloquized Ellis. "He never should have turned crooked in the first place. He's a disgrace to the profession."

Once Harrison disappeared, Ellis backed his flivver into the road and headed for the near-by town of Valley View. From there he telephoned his man Hastings in Ardmore.

The interview with Hastings was rather brief and most decidedly to the point. Hastings, it seemed, was surprised but not nearly so surprised as Ellis had anticipated; more than once before he had conducted transactions under cover. He was a little doubtful about handling the exchange of cash and deed through an intermediary, but Ellis did not have to argue severely to convince him that it was that way or not at all.

"And when will you get here with your lawyer and the money?" queried Charles.

"Friday night at eight-twelve."

"Good! My man will be waiting at the Quincy Hotel. Ask for G. H. Charlton. He'll be in his room, and you can go right up. You'll have plenty of privacy."

"G. H. Charlton?"

"That's the name."

"What does he look like? I know there's small chance of mistake, but I want to be quite sure it's the right man."

"Look like?" Ellis hesitated a moment, then grinned into the transmitter. "Lacking only a frock coat, he's a perfect undertaker."

The day following, Ellis managed to get word to Kenneth Harrison regarding the details. Old Harry was worried and ill at ease.

Fortunately for them, Hanvey did not put in an appearance at the office that day. The day after that, however, he waddled into the lobby, his multiple chins completely hiding the narrow band of collar which encircled the negligible height of his neck. He greeted Ellis cheerily.

"Thirty days will be up next week," he commented.

Ellis turned hurt eyes upon him. "You know good and well, Hanvey, that I'm not going back on my word. You'll have that money — with interest — on the thirtieth day."

"Not before?"

"Certainly not. I'm rushing matters to get it by then."

Jim sighed. "Gosh, son, I wasn't trying to hurry you. You're making it easy for me as it is."

Ellis smiled inwardly. After all, he knew that he was more keen than this flabby detective; he fancied that Jim really was grateful at being spared the intensive labor of investigation. And it really didn't matter to the Company, so long as the latter received its

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original money back.

The next two days dragged interminably. On Thursday night Ellis and his confederate met again in the oak grove, and the pudgy little bookkeeper made one last valiant effort to instill into the cashier a tithe of his own cocksureness.

"And where will you be all tomorrow evening?" questioned Harrison.

"In my room, of course," explained Ellis. "Don't you know that Hanvey will know when to expect these men? It's a cinch he'll be watching me. Remember, you're to meet them in the Quincy Hotel. Your room is reserved in the name of G. H. Charlton."

Old Harry was not convinced of his safety; he keenly regretted the whole affair, not because of a moral revulsion, but because he felt he was facing unanticipated danger. He possessed the uncomfortable sensation of having been cleverly used by his debonair associate. But there was nothing he could do.

Friday was a day of never-ending agony for the cashier. If Charles Ellis felt the slightest apprehension, he gave no sign. As a matter of fact, Ellis figured that the plan was certain to work, and whether it did or not, he was nicely in the clear.

That night Ellis ate his dinner at the Bon Ton, where he had discovered Jim Hanvey was in the habit of taking his evening meal. He had the satisfaction of seeing Jim enter, seat himself at a corner table and order profusely. Later their eyes met, and they smiled cordial greetings to one another. A warm glow suffused Charles Ellis at the success of this little additional touch of the theatric; it struck him as being the final deft stroke of the master artist. He experienced some slight feeling of pity for the ponderous detective who was munching away enthusiastically on a large slice of broiled ham.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kenneth F. Harrison nibbled his own dinner with a vast absence of appetite. Mr. Harrison was excruciatingly nervous. Instinct counseled flight; avarice held him to the course prescribed by Charles Ellis. After all, fifty thousand dollars in hard cash was no mean stake. Old Harry had always wanted fifty thousand dollars — it was a goal he had arbitrarily set for himself many years before.

At seven-thirty he telephoned the information bureau at the Union Station and learned that the train was on time. At eight o'clock he registered at the Quincy Hotel as G. H. Charlton and went immediately to his room.

There he waited. The seconds dragged into minutes, and the minutes crawled like hours. At eight-forty the room 'phone tinkled: Hastings and his lawyer were invited to come up. Harrison was nervous; he handed over for immediate inspection the conveyance. The men from Oklahoma went over it minutely. The lawyer nodded slowly.

"Good as gold," was his verdict.

From a suitcase Hastings produced

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a package of money. Old Harry's first impression was one of amazement that such a large and vital amount of cash should occupy such a small portion of space. With trembling fingers he counted out one hundred and twenty-eight thousand dollars in legal tender. The visitors departed. Harrison locked his door and tested the lock thrice. He counted off twenty-eight thousand dollars, which he wrapped carefully in a piece of brown paper brought for the purpose. From the hotel he proceeded to his home, where he hid the satchel containing the hundred thousand. With the twenty-eight thousand in his hands, he left the house.

At a corner drug store which knew him not he bought a box of fine cigars. He asked the clerk to combine the package containing the twenty-eight thousand dollars with the box of cigars. The two together did not present any great bulk. Then Harrison addressed the packet to Charles Ellis and requested immediate delivery. He saw the delivery boy personally and tipped him fifty cents.

Twenty minutes later Charles Ellis was in possession of the package. He first carefully destroyed the wrapper which had been addressed in Harrison's handwriting. Then, with a satisfied smile on his red lips, he counted the money.

He was at peace with himself and with the world. Not for a moment did he distrust the promise of immunity which had been made him. In his possession was the equivalent of the stolen money, interest at eight per cent., and a trifling surplus for lagniappe.

Charles felt himself glowing rosily all over. For years he had planned this *coup* — a modest bit of thievery demanding patience, ability and painstaking care. He had crowned his efforts by completely disarming a detective who — while Charles considered him grossly overrated — was nevertheless a very famous person.

Barring only Jim's discovery of the Ardmore operations, the thing had worked with machinelike smoothness, and even that, now that it was safely surmounted, had been a rather welcome obstacle. Matter of fact, Ellis figured he had been a trifle short-sighted in not foreseeing Hanvey's discovery of his venture in the by-products of oil property. Easy enough to trace a thing of that sort. — There was double satisfaction in the thought that even though the barrier had been unforeseen, he had scaled it without turning a hair.

To-morrow he'd give the money to Jim — a final splendid gesture of disdain for cumbrous legal machinery. Then, at leisure, he'd split with Old Harry and enjoy himself modestly on the income from fifty thousand dollars. Let's see, at eight per cent. — and certainly, he figured, a man of his discrimination should be able to net eight per cent. with safety — that'd mean four thousand dollars a year, more than he had ever earned by dint of arduous toil. The telephone jangled, breaking in sharply on his

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contented reflections.

"'Lo." He recognized instantly the drawling voice and his own lips smiled. "That you, Charles?"

"Yes. Hanvey?"

"None other." A pause and then, "Where you been all evening?"

"Right here. You haven't been trying to get me on the 'phone, have you?"

"No. I was figuring on saying I had been, but I reckon if you ain't been out, that wouldn't be no use, would it?"

"Not a bit. How's things, Hanvey?"

"So-so. What you doin' now?"

"Nothing. Why don't you drop around and chat awhile? I've got something here that may interest you."

"Sure, son — sure. We seem to hit it off together pretty good."

Awaiting Jim Hanvey, Ellis set his room to rights with deft touches approaching the effeminate. He adjusted this and straightened that, set out cigars and cigarettes and a pocket flask.

A knock on the door, and Jim slouched into the room. He flung his hat at the lounge, missed, and permitted it to rest on the floor. He lighted one of his vicious cigars, declined a drink and yawned comfortably.

"Swell little ol' room you got here, son."

"Pretty nice. I hope to move into an apartment soon."

"Great stuff. Mind if I drop in once in a while?"

Charles was immensely pleased. "I'd really be delighted — if you cared —"

"Most of my best friends are crooks, Charles. Honest men are awful dull."

It was gratifying, reflected Ellis, to be classified with the élite of the criminal world: a deliciously novel sensation.

"How's business?" inquired Hanvey.

"Fair. Or I might even say good."

"Sell your leases yet?"

"Yes."

Ellis, watching closely, fancied he discerned a start of surprise. Certainly the slow drooping of lids over Jim's fishy eyes displayed the interest of the detective.

"Honest?"

"Sure pop."

"You're the keen little business man, son. Never let no grass grow under your feet, do you?"

The moment was too good to lose. Assuming a very casual air, Charles produced the envelope containing the money. He tossed this into Jim's lap.

"Reckon we might as well wind up our little deal now as later, Hanvey. Count it."

Jim fumbled awkwardly with the wrapping, disclosing at length a neat package of crisp new bills. He whistled softly.

"Twenty-four thousand — five — No flies on you, Charles. Six — seven — yep, she's all here, plus. Sure am glad you came across all right."

"I said I would, didn't I?"

"Sure did. You ought to be terribly tickled with yourself."

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"Frankly, I am. I think I've done mighty well for an amateur."

"Boy, I'll say you have. You're a credit to the profession." Jim delved deeply into the capacious side pocket of his enormous coat. From it he extracted a package rather larger than the one Charles had given him. "Reckon I might as well put it all together," he said softly. "I get nervous carrying this much money."

A premonition of disaster gripped Mr. Charles Ellis. He couldn't understand why — certainly Jim's manner had not changed; there was no hint of anything untoward in his bearing or the inflection of his gentle, drawling voice.

"Carrying — what?" questioned Charles.

"This much cash."

"How much?"

Jim answered without even looking up: it was as though he were remarking on the weather.

"Hundred and twenty-eight thousand dollars."

Ellis inbreathed audibly. A choking sensation seemed to have caught his throat. He shook his head.

"I — I don't quite understand."

"Ain't nothin' to understand," explained Jim. "I got the twenty-eight grand from you, and the rest of it from Harrison."

"You — you're lying!" The words slipped out harshly, almost without thought. Jim looked up reprovingly.

"Gosh, son — I wouldn't say nothin' like that to no stranger. I never lie when it's unnecessary. Look here —" He opened the other packet. "Count it, son. It's the very identical hundred thousand that bird Hastings from Ardmore paid over to Harrison less'n two hours ago."

It was more than a little difficult for Charles to recover in an instant from this final crushing blow. Just when things seemed to have worked out perfectly, here was this big, blundering detective turning up with the profits of the Oklahoma transaction and a calm explanation which indicated thorough familiarity with Harrison's complicity in the affair.

"What's the matter, Charles?" questioned Jim quietly. "Ain't worried about your buddy, are you? We ain't plannin' to put Harrison in stir. Gosh, no! You and him sure made a swell investment of the Company's money. They're awful obliged — or will be when I tell 'em."

It seemed to the pudgy little bookkeeper that the room was whirling with undue rapidity. Before his dazed eyes the words "*Why?*" and "*How?*" seemed to leap from space and hammer into his brain. His lips uttered the question.

"What — what made you suspect Harrison?"

Jim gazed upon him benignly.

"You told me yourself, Charles."

"I told you?"

"Sure. That very first day. Y'see, son, you ought to always learn that it ain't no good taking a feller into your confidence unless you go the whole hog. You met me that day an' told me a wonderful little story — one of

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the best I've ever heard. I sure enjoyed it — because for one thing it started me thinking, an' I sort o' like to think — sometimes. It's so amusing.

"Well, here's what I thought: 'Clever kid,' I says to myself, meaning you. 'And it's a cinch he's got some reason besides what he claims for tellin' me all this. Now *if* he's got a reason, it's kind of up to me to find out what that reason is.'

"Well, Charles, I goes on and figures thisaway: 'His scheme is too good to be true,' I says to myself. 'He's pulled a clever stunt an' he ain't content to stop there. In other words,' I says to myself, 'he's being too damned clever. Therefore,' I says, 'he's trying to cover up somebody.'

"Now, right away, son, I seen that fitted in nice an' pretty with my idea that you hadn't been playin' a lone hand in this game. Too risky, I figured. An' there was only two folks you could have been mixed up with. One was the president. The other was the cashier. I could flip a nickel an' call heads or tails.

"But you made it easy for me, because you told me it was the cashier."

"H-h-how did I tell you?"

"By explaining how doggoned innocent that feller was. Son, there couldn't no man be as innocent as you made Harrison out to be, an' him not be a crook too. Once I got the Harrison hunch, it was a cinch to check up on him. An' to-night when he got back to his rooms, I just borrowed that hundred thousand off him." Jim relighted his cigar. "Ain't it simple, Charles? Ain't it easy as falling off a log?"

Charles did not answer immediately. He was undecided whether it was as easy as Jim claimed, or whether he had grossly underestimated Hanvey's ability. He preferred the latter idea.

And then he felt anger surging within him — anger which was an outgrowth of the keen, stabbing disappointment at this sudden crumbling of his dreams. He wanted to cry. The Brobdingnagian form of the unkempt detective seemed to taunt him. His voice rose, shrill with hysteria.

"I trusted you, Jim Hanvey; I trusted you — and you threw me down. You did me a dirty trick. You double-crossed me. You — you —"

"Them's harsh words, Charles. I wouldn't git so peeved if I was you."

"But — but —" Charles seemed about to weep. "You're going back on your word. You promised me —"

"Immunity," drawled Hanvey. There was no sarcasm in his voice, but something very like regret. "One hundred thousand dollars' worth of immunity. Think it over, son."

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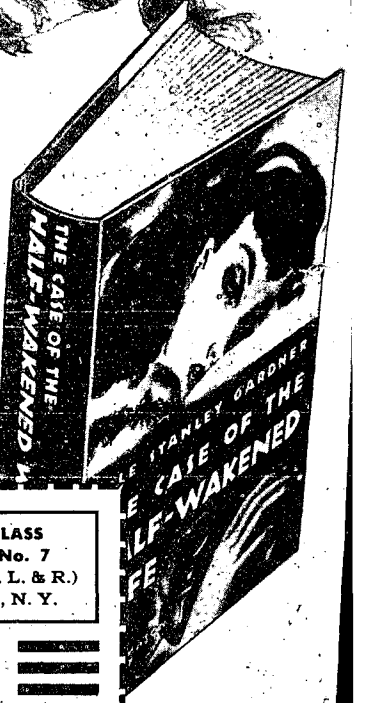

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